

TALES OF THE SAINTS OF PANDHARPUR

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To

My friend MR. W. C. SHEPHERD, I.C.S.

in memory

of twenty-five years' unbroken and greatly valued
friendship.

INTRODUCTION

As the following tales have all been translated from the *Bhaktivijaya* (Victory of devotion) of Mahipati, a sketch of that admirable poet's life will not be out of place, especially as it resembles in many particulars the life of one of his own saints.

Mahipati was the son of Dadopant a Rigvedi Deshastha Brahman, who was the hereditary kulkarni of Tarabad in the Ahmadnagar district. Dadopant was an ardent worshipper of Vithoba of Pandharpur. Yet in spite of many pilgrimages to the shrine of Vithoba, Dadopant and his wife remained childless. It was not until Dadopant was nearly sixty years of age that he became a father. The story runs that once when Dadopant had gone to Pandharpur on one of his pilgrimages, the god Vithoba appeared to him in a dream. The god put into his worshipper's hands a ball of sweetmeats and bade him give it to his wife. When Dadopant awoke, he found the ball of sweetmeats still in his hand. Dadopant carried the ball of sweetmeats home and gave it to his wife, in less than a year she gave birth to a son (A.D. 1715). The parents of the little boy called him Mahipati.

From his earliest childhood Mahipati shewed signs of a religious temperament ; and he was only five years old when he begged leave from his father to join a company of pilgrims and go with them to Pandharpur. From that time to his father's death, which occurred when he was only sixteen, Mahipati made a yearly pilgrimage to the great shrine. Upon his father's death he became in his place kulkarni of Tarabad. Not long afterwards he resigned Government service, because the Musulman jaghirdar under whom he was employed tried to force him to work, when he (Mahipati) wanted to say his prayers. Not only did he resign the kulkarniship, but he took a vow that not only he but his descendants would never take a post under Government again—a vow which, so it is said, his descendants still scrupulously observe.

After resigning the kulkarniship, Mahipati devoted himself more than ever to the worship of Vithoba. One night his devotion was rewarded. The poet saint Tukaram appeared to him in a dream and bade him write the lives of the Deccan saints. In obedience to Tukaram's command Mahipati

began the Bhaktivijaya, finishing it in A.D. 1762 or 1763. The Bhaktivijaya is Mahipati's principal work. But he also wrote the Katha Saramrit, the Santlilamrit, the Bhaktlilamrit and the unfinished Santvijaya.

Mahipati was a contemporary of Moropant the greatest of all the Maratha poets and won the latter's profound admiration. Indeed had Mahipati used a linguistic medium more widely known than Marathi, he would have ranked high among the world's poets. Even a foreigner can appreciate the easy flow of his stanzas, his musical rhymes and above all his unrivalled imagery. Mahipati died in 1790 A.D., leaving two sons, Vithoba and Narayanboa. Vithoba became a musician of some note at the court of Bajirao the Second and was the lifelong friend of Moropant.

The saints of whom Mahipati wrote not only moulded the religious thought of the Maratha people, but, as Ranade pointed out, they also prepared the way for the coming of Shivaji. In our History of the Maratha People, we have adopted Ranade's view.¹ Readers of the History may therefore like to know more of the saints and of the miracles which, according to popular tradition, they wrought.

In my translation I have adhered as closely as I could to the original; but in many places I have been forced to cut out imagery which, suitable enough in poetry, would seem wearisome and exaggerated in prose. Even as it is, some of my readers may perhaps complain that I have retained too many of the poet's similes. My reply is that I felt bound as translator to retain as much of the original as I could.

In conclusion I have to thank my friend Mr. Dyagude, Chief Karbhari of the Bhor State, for introducing me to Mahipati's work and for reading part of it with me. My thanks are also due to Mr. Mahableshwarkar of the Bombay Educational Service for obtaining for me particulars of Mahipati's life.

C. A. K.

I. History of the Maratha People, by Kincaid and Paransis, Oxford University Press.

CONTENTS

		PAGE
1.	Pundalik and the Lord Krishna	7
2.	The Coming of Dnyandev	11
3.	Dnyandev and Visoba Khechar	16
4.	Jayadev	18
5.	Kabir	24
6.	Kabir and Kamal	27
7.	Kabir and Ramanand	29
8.	Padmanabh	33
9.	Bhanudas	34
10.	Bhanudas and King Ramaraj	37
11.	Keshavswami	43
12.	Gomai and the Lord Krishna	45
13.	Latif Shah	47
14.	Santoba Powar	48
15.	Niloba	52
16.	Bahirambhat and Nagnath	54
17.	Janjaswant	57
18.	King Satwik	59
19.	Sena the Barber	60
20.	Jagamitra	63
21.	Namdev	66
22.	Namdev and Dnyandev	69
23.	Namdev and the Brahmans	72
24.	Namdev and the Gold Stone	75
25.	Gora the Potter	77
26.	Namdev and Visoba Khechar	80
27.	Parisa Bhagwat	84

		PAGE
28.	Dnyandev and Changdev	87
29.	Narhari the Goldsmith	89
30.	Kanhopatra	91
31.	Rohidas the Shoemaker	94
32.	Mirabai	95
33.	King Pipaji and the Tiger	98
34.	Narsi Mehta	101
35.	Ramdas of Dakor	105
36.	Shanta Bahmani	108
37.	Damajipant	111
38.	Kurmadas	116
39.	Raka the Potter	118
40.	The End of Dnyandev and his Brethren ..	119

TALES OF THE SAINTS OF PANDHARPUR

I. PUNDALIK AND THE LORD KRISHNA

Once upon a time when the Deccan was but sparsely peopled, a forest called the Dandirvan forest grew along the banks of the Bhima river. The forest took its name from a certain demon called Dandir who had once lived there. In the middle of it was a village called Pandharpur. It stood upon the banks of the Bhima, where it takes a big curve known as the Chandrabhaga. It was a sacred spot; for the moon god had bathed there, vainly trying to rid himself of the black marks which Gautama had stamped on his face for helping Indra in his attempt to carry off the lovely Ahalya.

Now in Pandharpur there dwelt a certain Brahman named Janudeva and his wife Satyavati. Heaven had blessed them with a son called Pundalik, who until he was sixteen years old was all that parents could wish a son to be. At sixteen Janudeva married Pundalik to the daughter of a neighbouring householder. But the marriage proved the parents' bane. Under his wife's influence Pundalik began to ill-treat them. Although they had reached the evening of life and had earned rest and leisure, Pundalik forced them to grind the corn, to sweep and clean the floors, to wash the clothes and fetch the water, while he and his wife spent their days in idleness.

One day a band of pilgrims on their way to Benares passed Pandharpur. When Janudeva and Satyavati saw them, they resolved to join them, for they had no happiness in their home and were weary of their lives. But when Pundalik's

wife heard of their flight, she said to her husband, "Let us join the pilgrims also"; for she did not wish that the aged couple should escape her. Pundalik agreed. He and his wife hired horses and soon overtook the pilgrims who went on foot. The hearts of Janudeva and Satyavati sank within them when they saw Pundalik and his wife overtake them. Their fears were soon realised. Every evening Pundalik made them groom the two horses and attend to his own wants before he let them go to rest. And in no long time Janudeva and Satyavati came bitterly to regret that they had ever gone on the pilgrimage.

One night darkness overtook the pilgrims before they had reached the appointed stage, so they resolved to pass the night at the hermitage of a great seer named Kukutswami, which stood in some woods a little off the main road. The rishi welcomed and fed them. Soon all the pilgrims wearied with the day's march fell fast asleep. Only Pundalik remained awake. Until dawn came he tossed restlessly from side to side. Suddenly he became aware that a company of beautiful women clad in soiled raiment had entered the room. Some of the fair women cleaned and swept the floor, others fetched water, others again washed Kukutswami's clothes. But they moved so silently, that none of the tired pilgrims even moved in his sleep. Their work done, the beautiful women went into the great seer's chamber. After seeing him for a moment they came back and passed close to Pundalik. As they did so, he saw that their raiment was no longer soiled, but was clean and white. A moment later and the strange visitors had vanished in the darkness outside the hut.

Next morning the pilgrims would have continued their journey. But Kukutswami insisted that they should spend with him at least one more night. They accepted gladly, because the woods were cool and a soft breeze blew across a lotus-covered lake close by. That night the pilgrims went

to sleep as quickly as they had done the previous night. But Pundalik again lay sleepless. Once more he tossed restlessly until the Eastern sky began to pale. Then the same company of beautiful but ill-clad women entered the hermitage, swept and cleaned the floor, and after passing into Kukutswami's chamber, returned as they had done before in snow-white spotless raiment. Pundalik threw himself at their feet and asked them who they were. "I am the Ganges," said the tallest and fairest among them. "Those with me are the Krishna, the Yamuna, the Godavari, the Bhima and the other sacred rivers in which pilgrims wash themselves free from their sins. It is the stains of their wickedness that make our garments soiled. But by working for and doing homage to Kukutswami, our garments lose their stains and become snow-white as before. But of all the pilgrims who have yet visited the holy places, there is none equal in wickedness to thee, O Pundalik, for there is no crime so dark as the ingratitude of a son to his parents."

On hearing the words of the tall beautiful woman, Pundalik saw his acts in their true light. And before she and her companions had passed into the night, the heart of Pundalik had changed. From the cruellest he became the most devoted of sons. Next morning he threw himself at the feet of Janudeva and Satyavati. He implored their forgiveness and prevailed on them to return to Pandharpur. Pundalik and his wife walked by the side of the horses which now bore Janudeva and Satyavati. After they had returned to their home, no parents were ever better served than they were by Pundalik and his wife.

Now one day it happened that at Dwarka king Krishna sat thinking of his early days on the banks of the Yamuna. He remembered his sports with the milkmaids and how they, and especially his favourite Radha, had wept when he had left Mathura. So great was his longing to see the lovely Radha

that by his divine powers he brought her back from the dead to sit once more upon his lap. Just then his queen the stately Rukmani entered the room. Radha should at once have risen to do her honour, but she remained seated. The queen in a fury left the king's presence, and fleeing to the Deccan hid herself in the Dandirvan forest. As Rukmani did not return to Dwarka, king Krishna felt alarmed and went to Mathura, thinking that she had fled thither. From Mathura he went to Gokula. There he again took the form of a child and round him began once more to play the cows and the herd-boys, the calves and the milkmaids. They too joined in the search and even Mount Govardhan freed itself from its foundations and set forth with the gay company to look for Rukmani, and the king with Govardhan mountain and his maids and cows, his herd-boys and calves crossed the Vindhya and made his way to the Bhima river. Outside the Dandirvan forest the king left his attendants at a spot still called Gopalpura, or the town of him who guarded the kine. Then wandering through the woods he searched for Rukmani. At last he found her still torn with grief and jealousy. Her anger yielded to the caresses of the king. And reconciled they walked hand in hand through the woods until they came to Pundalik's hermitage.

At this time Pundalik was attending to his parents' wants. Even the news that the divine king waited without did not distract him from his duty. He refused to do him homage until his work was done. But he threw a brick outside that the visitor might stand upon it. The king, whose godlike mind knew the hearts of men, forgave the slight to himself and honoured one who so honoured his father and mother. After Pundalik had ended his filial task, he went outside and prostrated himself before Krishna, who was standing upon the brick which Pundalik had flung to him. He raised Pundalik and taking him in his arms told him to fear

nothing but ever afterwards to worship him under the name of Vithoba or him who stood upon a brick. Pundalik paid heed to the divine command and built a temple in which the images of Krishna and Rukmani have dwelt side by side unto this day.

2. THE COMING OF DNYANDEV

Many years after the Lord Krishna had come to Pandharpur, the world, as foretold in the Mahabharata, had become very evil and in the place of righteousness there flourished wickedness everywhere. One day the gods Brahma and Shiva took counsel together and went to see the lord Krishna, who reclined upon his serpent Shesha, surrounded by the Milky Ocean. With him too they took counsel and in the end the three resolved that they would be born on earth as three Brahman brothers and that Lakshmi should take human shape as their sister.

Now at this time there lived in Apegaon on the banks of the Ganges a pious Brahman named Govindpant. To him his wife Nirabai bore a son whom they named Vithoba. When eight years old Vithoba was invested with the sacred thread and instructed in the Vedas, the Shastras and other holy books. The study of them turned his thoughts from the cares of this world and with his parents' leave he left his home and began to wander through the various shrines of India. He journeyed to Dwarka where the lord Krishna once ruled and bathed in the Gomti river. He went to Mulmadhav where king Bhimak gave Rukmani in marriage to the lord Krishna. He sojourned at Bhaluka where the lord Krishna died and at Prabhasinga where Arjuna wedded Subhadra. At last his wanderings brought him to Alandi on the banks of the Indrayani river. After bathing he sat on the bank praying to the lord Krishna. Just then a Brahman named Siddhupant came up and seeing the pious youth, bowed

to him and asked him who he was and whence he came. Vithoba replied, "My home is at Apegaon on the banks of the Ganges. There my forefathers have been the village clerks for many generations. My parents live there, but are now stricken in years. I have come here after visiting Dwarka and other shrines near it." Vithoba's speech pleased Siddhupant and his heart warmed towards the lonely youth. He took the boy home and shared with him his midday meal. After it Siddhupant slept and saw in a dream the lord Krishna. "Clothe your daughter in rich raiment," said the God, "and bestow her on the Brahman youth." When Siddhupant awoke, he offered his daughter's hand to Vithoba. But the latter excused himself: "I cannot wed her," he said, "unless I also receive a command from the Lord Krishna." That night the God appeared in a dream to the boy also and bade him wed Siddhupant's daughter, for in her womb would be conceived the incarnations of four great Gods. Next morning Vithoba told Siddhupant of his dream and Siddhupant betrothed him to his daughter Rakhmabai. After their marriage the bride and bridegroom journeyed to Pandharpur and thence to Rameshwaram. When they returned to Alandi, Siddhupant went with them to Apegaon to visit Vithoba's parents. They had hardly ended this visit when Vithoba's father and mother died. A deep gloom settled over Vithoba and he went always twice a year—on the eleventh of Ashad and the eleventh of Kartik—to Pandharpur in the hope that his wife might bear him a son. But none came to bless their home. At last Vithoba could bear his grief no more and fled to Benares that he might become an anchorite.

At Benares Vithoba met a famous saint and falling at his feet implored him to teach him the divine doctrine. The saint, unwilling to commit a sin, asked him whether he had a wife or children. "I am alone in the world," said Vithoba

falsely ; " I have neither wife nor kinsmen. The saint took him into his hermitage and Vithoba soon had learnt all that he could teach him. Some time after this the saint resolved to visit the holy places in the South. In his pilgrimage he came to Alandi.

There he met Rakhmabai who was worshipping an Ashwatta tree. She bowed to the anchorite as he drew near. He in return blessed her saying, " May you be the mother of eight sons ! " Rakhmabai smiled sadly and replied, " As seed sown on a blazing hearth, or rain fallen on a rock, such, O anchorite, was your blessing." She then told him the story of her husband's flight and as he questioned her, he learnt that her husband was the very man whom he had himself instructed. He grew angry and said, " I who thought myself above other men have myself committed a great sin in instructing this man. In my pride I was like the bitter sea finding fault with the sweetness of the Ganges river." He bade Siddhupant and Rakhmabai return with him to Benares. There he went to Vithoba and made him confess the truth. After rebuking him, he made him cast aside the anchorite's garb and become once more Vithoba the householder.

Vithoba returned with Siddhupant and Rakhmabai to Alandi. But the men of that place mocked him, saying, " After worshipping Vishnu, he prostrates himself before Vetal. After bragging of his saintliness, he has come back to enjoy his wife's embraces." Vithoba cared nothing for their taunts. But the Brahmans, enraged at his indifference, outcasted him and drove him from Alandi. In the woods he built a hut. There his wife dwelt with him and in course of time bore him three sons and a daughter. In the eldest, Nirvatti, the god Shiva took human form. The second, Dnyandev, was Vishnu's incarnation. The third, Sopana, was that of Brahma Deva. And in the daughter, Muktibai, the goddess Lakshmi descended upon earth.

Children of outcaste parents, Nivratti, Dnyandev, Sopana and Muktabai were shunned by all the villagers of Alandi. As they grew in years and stature Rakhmabai grew anxious for their future. Vithoba at her bidding went to the Brahmins of Alandi and asked them what penance he should perform to atone for returning to the married life. They searched their books and told him that death alone could free him from the consequences of his sin. He went back sadly to his wife and told her. Then Nivratti went to the Brahmins and asked them how he might be admitted into the caste. The Brahmins answered mocking him, "You are neither Vaishyas nor Brahmins. You are neither light nor darkness. You are neither men, nor gods, nor devils. We cannot help you. Go to Paithan and get there, if you can, a letter of purification."

The three brothers and Muktabai bowed to the Brahmins and made their way ruefully to Paithan on the banks of the Godavari. There they told their story to the Brahmins who sneered at them much as the Brahmins of Alandi had done. "We cannot help those" they said,—"who are utterly defiled. You cannot make a Sudra a Brahman by bathing him in the Ganges, nor an earthen pot gold by touching it with a parisa stone.¹ Stay; if you prostrate yourself alike before every cow, hare, ass, dog, hog and Mhar that you meet, in the end the lord Krishna may have pity on you." Then the Brahmins asked the three boys their names. On hearing Dnyandev's name they burst into a fit of laughter and said, "Your having a name like that, is like a milkless cow having long horns or a blind man having big eyes." Just then a man drove past them a young buffalo carrying a skin of water. To mock Dnyandev they gave it also the name of Dnyandev. "You have done well," said Dnyandev, "for just as you find the sun's image in every pot, so the spirit of

^{1.} The Philosopher's Stone.

the lord Krishna pervades men and beasts alike." "If there is no difference between you and that buffalo," retorted the Brahmans, "and you are as learned as your name implies, make it recite the Vedas." Dnyandev walked up to the buffalo and placing his head on its forehead said, "To oblige these Brahmans recite the Rigveda." The buffalo, recited the Rigveda through without a single error and afterwards repeated in the same way the other three Vedas. The Brahmans were amazed at the miracle and went silently to their homes.

Some days later the house owner with whom Vithoba's children lodged wished to hold a memorial service in honour of his dead father. He invited the Brahmans of Paithan to attend it. "Nay," they said, "we cannot enter your house so long as the children of a renegade anchorite dwell in it." The householder returned to his house and sat sadly in a corner. Dnyandev questioned him and learnt the reason. "Be not sad," he said to his host, "but rejoice. Prepare your feast and care nothing for the Brahmans. For your ancestors themselves will attend the feast."

The householder bathed. Then he cooked various dishes and served them as if his guests were present. Dnyandev took a handful of rice and flung it in the air. A moment later the householder saw to his amazement his dead ancestors enter the room in the flesh. He gave them the gifts set aside for the Brahmans. They ate their fill of the food which Brahmans should have eaten. He gave them water to cleanse their hands and then rolls of betel-nut leaves. These they accepted. Then saying, "Live in happiness," they vanished. The Brahmans, who had come to mock at the empty seats, could not believe their eyes. At last they murmured, "It is Dnyandev who has worked this miracle. It was he who brought his host's ancestors to the banquet. Fools that we were ! It is idle for us to prescribe penances for him and his brethren, when they are far purer than ourselves."

With these words they wrote a letter of purification to the Brahmans of Alandi, telling them how Dnyandev had made a buffalo recite the Vedas and had recalled the dead to life. Vithoba's children took this letter with them, and also the buffalo, to which Dnyandev gave the name of Mhasoba. As they journeyed, they halted at Ale wood. There the buffalo fell sick and after once again repeating the Vedas, it died. Dnyandev erected a shrine over the dead beast and gave it freedom from the pain of rebirth. From Ale they returned to Alandi and after bowing to their mother's feet, they gave the letter of the Paithan Brahmans to those of Alandi. As Indra honours the words of Brihaspati or the sunflower the face of the sun, so the Alandi Brahmans honoured the letter that came from the holy city. They bowed before Dnyandev and his brethren and without further hindrance invested them with the sacred thread.

3. DNYANDEV AND VISOBA KHECHAR

Yet in spite of the letter of purification, a Brahman, Visoba Chati by name, remained unconvinced and continued to hate Dnyandev and his brethren and denounce them as outcastes. Whenever he saw them he would fly into a passion and revile them, just as Duryodhan did when men spoke of Yudhishtira in his presence. On Divali day Dnyandev bade Muktabai prepare a special dish for their dinner. Muktabai went into the village and after buying flour went on to the potter's to buy a pot. On the way Visoba met her and in an angry voice asked her where she was going. Muktabai began to tremble like a flower that fears to be trodden on, or a koil when it sees a hawk. She answered timidly, "I am going to the potter's to buy a pot for our Divali dinner." Visoba struck her cruelly several times. Then as she stood weeping, he ran to the potter and warned him that if he sold

her a pot he would press him for the money which he owed him. A little later Muktabai reached the potter's house. But he was frightened of Visoba and refused to sell her anything. Muktabai went home and sat weeping in her room. Dnyandev went to her and asked her what ailed her. She told him her story. And as she told him, Visoba, who stood looking from his window into Dnyandev's house, smiled with satisfaction. "There is no need to weep," said Dnyandev, and knelt on the ground. "Cook the dish on my back," he added. As he spoke, he by his divine science lit an internal fire. His eyes shone like live coals. Flames issued from his mouth and his back glowed as red as the waves of the Jambu river. Muktabai brought flour and rice and kneading them together put them upon Dnyandev's back. At once almost the dish was cooked. Then Dnyandev quenched the fire within him and rose to his feet. Visoba, who had hoped to gloat upon their grief, was convinced of Dnyandev's saintliness by the miracle worked before him. "I am," he cried, "like one who spurns diamonds, thinking they are glass, or like a man who cuts down the Wishing Tree thinking it to be a thorn bush. I must humble myself before Dnyandev and win his forgiveness."

With these words Visoba left his window and ran into Dnyandev's house. Seeing the dish, he plunged his hands into it, hoping to avert punishment by eating some of the sacred food. But before it reached his lips, Dnyandev said, "Go forth; my curse on you is that you become a khechar (demon)." Hearing the stern voice and the awful words of the saint, Visoba threw himself on the ground. "Pardon me, Lord, pardon me," he cried, "and take back your curse." Then a smile lit up Dnyandev's face and he said, "I cannot take back a curse once pronounced. You shall go forth a 'khechar', but in name only. Instead of Visoba Chati men shall call you Visoba Khechar." Visoba went forth and so

genuine was his repentance that soon he became one of the holiest of Dnyandev's disciples.

4. JAYADEV

Now Vyasa, the great saint, who wrote the Mahabharata and told in deathless verse the deeds of the Bharata heroes, was at the lord Krishna's command born again as Jayadev in the family of a Brahman who dwelt in Tundabilwa near Jagannath. And just as the moon surpasses the stars and Indra the lesser gods, so Jayadev surpassed in wisdom the youths of India. When he reached man's estate, he had explored all the sacred writings of the ancient sages. Then dwelling apart for a season, he wrote the Gita Govind or the song of the lord Krishna. And when he had written it, he went singing verses of it from door to door. Thus its fame spread everywhere, just as the perfume of a flower is wafted abroad. Now at this time the king of Jagarnath was called king Satvik. He too wrote the story of the lord Krishna, imitating the poem of Jayadev. He had copies made of it and distributed them among his subjects and he bade them learn his verses by heart.

When the holy men of his kingdom heard what he had done, they went to king Satvik and said, "O king, you have scattered your book abroad and bidden your people learn it. But know you not that to praise one's own work is folly ; and that even the fragrance of musk or of sandalwood, or the beauty of a maid or of an emerald, loses its value if offered for nothing?" But the king grew angry and said, "Bring the two poems here and place them to-night in front of the lord Krishna's image. He shall judge between them. Let him keep the book which he likes and let him cast out the other." The priests did as the king had ordered and that night placed before the lord Krishna's image the book of the king and the

book of Jayadev. Then they locked the door and went to their houses. Next morning at Kakadarti¹ the priests went back to the temple. Outside the door they found the king's book. Then they mocked the king saying, "O king, the lord Krishna has indeed divided the milk from the water, Wisdom from Vanity. But of a truth, how can a crow affect to be a swan, a boor pass as a sage, a Mang pass as a pandit, tin as gold, or a beggarman as Indra ?" When the king heard their speech, he bowed his head low with shame and going close to the image of the lord Krishna said, "Lord, just as every pot reflects the sun, just as water tastes alike to the cow and the tiger, just as to the sky there is no difference between the locust and the eagle, so to you the sinner and the saint are alike. Yet you accepted Jayadev's book and cast mine out. I now go forth to slay myself, for live longer I cannot." Then the lord Krishna pitied king Satvik. He chose from the king's book twenty-four couplets and with his own hand wrote them in Jayadev's book.

When the time came for Jayadev's marriage, the lord Krishna appeared in a dream to an Agnihotra Brahman whose daughter Padmavati was so fair as to rival Laxmi herself and bade him bestow her on Jayadev. The Brahman did so and the marriage festivities lasted for four days. When they were over Jayadev and his bride lived together at Jagannath. A pious banker desired to be his pupil. He drove Jayadev in his carriage to his own city. There Jayadev stayed in the banker's house, teaching him the greatness of the lord Krishna. After a month he asked the banker's leave to go to his home. The banker placed his head upon Jayadev's feet and as a fee for his teaching, he filled his carriage with a great store of gold and bade his servants escort Jayadev home.

Now it happened that two thieves learnt that Jayadev was taking home a large treasure. They followed his carriage

¹ Kakadarti is the earliest worship of the idol, about 4 a.m.

looking for a chance to rob him. As long as the servants were there they dared not. At last the servants weary of the journey said, "Master, there is great need of us in our houses. Our wives want us at home. Give us therefore leave to return." Jayadev pitied them and told them to go back to their wives and little ones. The servants had hardly gone out of sight when the two thieves overtook Jayadev's carriage. They first bowed to him, mocking him as storks mock the fish they are about to devour. He guessed their meaning. Thinking that by submission he would save his life, he offered them his carriage and all the wealth in it. But the thieves feared that if they let him go free, he would betray them. So they cut off his hands and feet and flung him into a grain pit. Then taking his carriage, they drove back to their homes with all speed. Jayadev, sorely wounded, turned his thoughts to the lord Krishna and repeated to himself the names of him who dwells within the Milky Ocean.

Now it so chanced that a king, Kraunch by name, came riding by, after hunting in the forest. He saw a light coming from the grain pit and looking into it saw Jayadev sitting there all shining. For the lord Krishna to protect him had shed on him his holy radiance. Then the king noticed that Jayadev had neither hands nor feet. "Good Sir," said the king, "what evil befell you that you lost your limbs?" "Nay," said Jayadev calmly, "be not distressed, for I have had neither hands nor feet from my birth." The king marvelled at Jayadev's courage and bade his servants lift Jayadev from the pit and take him to his palace. There the king seated Jayadev on a golden throne and at the saint's request invited to his palace pious and godfearing anchorites. When the anchorites came, King Kraunch fed and clothed them and sent them away laden with rich gifts. And the fame of the king so spread that saints and beggars came to his doors, like ants to sugar heaps, or like the clouds to the mountain tops.

Now when the thieves who had robbed Jayadev heard how generously the king treated anchorites, they disguised themselves as holy men and made their way to king Kraunch's court. They put twelve white clay marks on their foreheads and bodies and tulsi rosaries round their necks. And just as a stork looks wiser than a sage and a dancing girl's song sounds sweeter than a saint's hymn, so the thieves looked more saintly than the real anchorites.

When the thieves entered the palace, they saw Jayadev sitting on a golden throne. They looked at each other in horror, for they felt like a hunter, who going to shoot a dove is bitten by a serpent. Jayadev recognised the thieves, but he had long forgiven them their crime. When they flung themselves before him, he rose and embraced them and turning to the attendants said, "Go tell the king that two saints have come." When the king came, he had a feast prepared for them and bade them stay as long as they would in his palace. The thieves consented but that night one said to the other, "We are in a parlous state. I have heard it said that there are some cruel rulers, who fatten evil-doers before torturing them so that they may suffer more keenly before they die. We are like birds caught in a snare or like fish that have swallowed a hook." The other agreed ruefully. Thus although food was daily placed before them, they every day grew thinner and thinner. At last king Kraunch said to Jayadev, "I give those two anchorites rich and plentiful meals. Yet they are as thin as if they ate nothing or as if they were dying of a decline." "To holy men," said Jayadev, "earthly pleasures are as poison. Let them go, O king, and give them as a parting present all that they ask for."

A day or two passed and the thieves could bear their suspense no longer. They sought audience of the king and said, "O king, give us leave to go. We who are wont to live in shrines and holy places, cannot bear the noise and turmoil

of a court." "As you will," said the king, "but before you go, tell me what parting present I should give you." "Give us, O king," said the thieves, "two waggons laden with treasure." The king remembering Jayadev's words bade his servants fill two waggons with gold and rich clothes and jewels. He sent two guards with the thieves and before they went he asked for and obtained their blessing. When they had gone some way, one of the guards asked, "O holy men, pardon me if I ask you a question. Many saints and devout men come to the palace. But to none has such favour been shewn as to you. Pray tell me the reason." The robbers answered, "We and Jayadev lived together in the country of a wicked king. Jayadev was minister; we were palace attendants. Jayadev was guilty of a crime and the king bade us take him into the woods and behead him. We took him away but we pitied him. So instead of cutting off his head, we cut off his hands and feet and threw him into a grain pit. Then in grief at his suffering we left the king's service and became anchorites. When we came to the palace, Jayadev recognised us and, grateful because we had spared his life, he bestowed these gifts upon us." As the robbers spoke, the earth trembled, opened, and swallowed them up.

The guards were aghast. At first they feared to return to the king. At length they went to Jayadev and told him what had happened. Jayadev wept on hearing the news and said, "Lord Krishna, why did you so punish them? You pitied Sisupal and Kansa¹. You gave them salvation, but those thieves you sent to Hell." Suddenly the lord Krishna appeared to Jayadev and said, "Well spoken; for you forgave your enemies." As the words left the lord Krishna's lips, Jayadev's hands and feet grew again. When the king next saw Jayadev, he wondered at the miracle and made

1. Sisupal was Krishna's rival in love. Kansa was his oppressor. Krishna killed them both but invited their spirits to his heaven.

Jayadev tell him the story of his life. The king on hearing it marvelled still more. He sent a palki for Padmavati with rich clothes and jewels. He also bade the queen treat Padmavati with the same respect with which he treated Jayadev.

Some days after Padmavati had reached the palace, she was sitting with the queen and her ladies, as far above them as the Ganges is above other rivers or the Gayatri above other mantras. Suddenly a messenger brought the news that the queen's brother was dead. Instantly his widow wild with grief left the palace and became a sati. The other ladies applauded her act. But Padmavati remained silent. "Do you not admire her devotion?" asked the queen. "Nay" said Padmavati, "when a wife hears of her husband's death, her life should instantly leave her body, just as his rays leave the setting sun, when he sinks below the horizon." The queen retorted, "You speak without experience. One who speaks without experience is like a body without life, or a face without a nose, or a king without an army." The queen thereafter called the minister and secretly bade him spread the news that Jayadev was dead, so that she might test Padmavati. One day the king went to hunt in the forest and took Jayadev with him. After they had gone some distance, the minister sent a man back to the palace with some blood-stained clothes and bade him declare that Jayadev had been killed by a tiger. The queen ran weeping into Padmavati's room and told her. Instantly, just as his rays leave the setting sun or as its fragrance leaves a crushed flower, so Padmavati's life left her body. When the king returned, he heard of her death and questioned the minister. The minister told the king everything. The king cried, "I cannot kill the queen, for that would be to kill a woman. I must therefore take my own life." With these words he bade his attendants light a great fire outside the city, so that he might

be consumed in it. Then he went to say good-bye to Jayadev. But the saint, knowing all, forbade the king to take his life. Then going close to Padmavati's body, he took up a lute and began to sing a hymn to the lord Krishna. "O lord of the world, who pitied Gajendra, who saved Pralhad, hasten now to my side ! You who guarded Draupadi from shame, who aided the Pandavas ! O husband of Rukmani, O help of the helpless, hasten now to my side !" Hearing his prayer the lord Krishna came and stood before him and asked him what boon he craved. Jayadev answered, "Give me back Padmavati." The lord Krishna going close to the dead woman embraced her. Instantly she sprang to her feet. Then the lord Krishna entered his heavenly chariot and rose into the Heavens. But from the skies fell a rain of flowers and celestial voices sang his praises and his greatness.

5. KABIR

The saint Kabir was the incarnation of the rishi Shuk. He was not born of woman but came into the world in this manner. One day at Manikanika ghat a certain Musulman weaver, Tamalmomin by name, was washing some bundles of thread in the sacred stream. As he washed them, he heard the cry of "Ram Ram" and looking down saw a shell floating by. He picked it out and opening it saw inside a beautiful little baby boy. He went home as pleased as one who, thinking that he is journeying to Yama's halls, finds himself at the gates of Vishnu's paradise. When his wife saw the little boy, she was so pleased that although not a mother she was able to nurse it. She and her husband gave the little boy the name of Kabir. Although brought up a Musulman, he never ceased to repeat the name of Ram. Often through thinking too deeply of the divine Ramachandra, he would swoon and lie unconscious by his loom. Then the lord

Krishna, fearing that Kabir's mother would beat him, would come and himself work the loom, while the child lay unconscious. One day Kabir came to himself while the Lord Krishna was still working at a gold embroidered shawl. The god did not vanish, but remained working at the loom with Kabir. So god and saint joined together their labour, just as the waters of the Saraswati mingle inseparably with those of the Ganges.

When the shawl was finished, Kabir folded it reverently and took it to his mother. She bade him take it to the market place and sell it. It was market day and traders came to look at Kabir's shawl. But to those who were willing to pay five rupees for a shawl, it seemed to be worth ten. To those who would have given ten it seemed to be worth twenty. To those willing to give five hundred rupees, it seemed worth a thousand. So no one asked Kabir to sell it, because each thought that it was of a better quality than what he needed. And all the time, Kabir paid no heed to those who thronged the market place ; for he sat motionless and repeated without ceasing the name of Rama.

When the sun set and the market place emptied, Kabir, whose shawl was still unsold, was afraid to go home, lest his mother should beat him. He stole away and hid himself in a ruined house like a little wife who fears her mother-in-law's tongue. The Lord Krishna took the form of an aged Brahman. Though the night was bitterly cold, he wore only a single tattered rag to cover his nakedness. He went up to Kabir and said in a whining voice, "I am old and poor and I have no clothes this bitter night. If you have any, give them to me, I entreat you." Kabir thought to himself, "If I send away a Brahman without a gift it will be a sin." He tore the costly shawl in half and gave one half to the Brahman. The Brahman left and Kabir began to sing a hymn softly to himself in the lonely house. The Lord Krishna went away a

few steps and took the form of a wandering mendicant. His hair was matted, bells tinkled round his ankles, a necklace of flint beads hung round his neck, he carried in his hand a rosary, and his eyes glared out of their red-rimmed sockets. He went to the door of Kabir's ruined house and gave a shout of frenzied laughter. Then he told Kabir to give him some clothes. "You are a Musulman," he added, "yet you sit here singing hymns to Rama." Kabir replied gently, "God, is one whether he be called Allah or Rama, just as the brightness of gold remains the same whether it is a nugget or a jewel." "Give me some clothes," repeated the fakir. Kabir handed him the half shawl that remained and the fakir taking it went away. Then Kabir rejoiced. He no longer grieved that no customer had bought the shawl. Had he sold it, he could not have done this act of charity. With the shawl had gone his troubles. So he felt like the moon when it has escaped from Rahu, or the Ocean after the gods had ceased to churn it with Mandara mountain.

The Lord Krishna next took the form of a Brahman and going to Kabir's house said to his mother; "I saw Kabir sitting in the market place. Customers wished to buy his shawl, but his thoughts were far away and he would give them no answer. When the market was over, he tore his shawl in two and gave half to a Brahman and half to a fakir. He is now sitting in a ruined house. I saw him, so I thought I would tell you." When Kabir's mother heard this tale she grew very angry and when the Brahman offered to take her to Kabir, she went with him. They went to the ruined house and saw Kabir sitting and praising Ramachandra, as Sita did in Ravana's Asoka forest. Kabir's mother said, "Bring me the shawl. If you have not got it I shall punish you." But Kabir did not heed her, for his thoughts were far away. His mother grew more and more angry and began to scold him. But the Brahman said, "What is the use of scolding

him? Whip him." As he spoke he thrust a cane into her hands. With it she struck Kabir on the back, but he felt no pain.

Suddenly the Lord Krishna threw aside his disguise. In his hands appeared the bow, on his back the quiver. A diadem rose above his brow. His eyes shone with celestial splendour. On his mighty chest shone the Kaustubha jewel. Diamond-studded anklets rang upon his feet. In his hand he held the hand of queen Sita, and as Ramachandra he shewed himself to Kabir. "You did me a favour," he said, "and I shall remember you always." He then took Kabir's mother in his arms and gently embraced her. "You are blessed above all women," he said, "to be the mother of such a son." Then Kabir's mother embraced her son and said, "Through you, my son, I have been vouchsafed a vision of Ramachandra." Taking him by the hand she led him home. As they went the Lord Krishna said, "Think of me always," and vanished from their sight.

6. KABIR AND KAMAL

When Kabir grew to manhood, his wife bore him a son, whom they called Kamal. One evening a band of pilgrims came to Kabir's house. Both he and his wife went out to welcome them. For both rejoiced to see saintly men, even as the parched soil rejoices when it sees a storm of rain. After Kabir had greeted them, he told his wife to prepare a meal for them. But his wife taking him aside said, "There is nothing in the house. I cannot prepare a meal."

On hearing his wife's words, Kabir went out and tried to borrow some grain from his neighbours. But no one would lend him any. "Go," they said, "and buy it in the village; why should we lend you any?" "Alas!" answered Kabir, "I have no money." But even so the neighbours would lend

him nothing and in the end they shut their doors in his face. He turned to his son and said, "We cannot send the pilgrims away empty. Let us go and steal some food for them." Kabir girt on a sword. Kamal fetched a crowbar and at midnight, when all were asleep, they went to a wealthy grocer's shop. They made a hole in the wall and the son crawled through it. He did not touch the rich clothes and jewels, but passed to his father, through the hole, grain and rice, ghee and molasses, pulse and vegetables. When Kabir had got enough for the saints' dinner, he bade his son come out. But Kamal did not wish to go without telling the grocer what he had done, any more than he would have spoken evil of him behind his back. He went to the sleeping shopkeeper and touching him gently said, "Wake up, Sir Merchant. I am one of two thieves who have just broken into your house. But I could not go without telling you." The grocer sat up in bed and Kamal ran away. As he strove to get through the hole by which he had come, the grocer caught him by the legs. There he lay helpless like a deer taken in a net, or a swan in the talons of an eagle. Kamal said to his father, "My father, the grocer has caught me by the legs and is dragging me back through the wall. If he sees my face, he will raise the whole town against us. The saints will not eat stolen food. They will flee from your house, just as a learned man does when a Mang enters his dwelling, or as a chaste wife does when a dancing girl tries to talk to her. Cut off my head so that the grocer may not know who I am." Kabir's heart sank within him when he heard his son's words. But he drew his sword and cut off Kamal's head. Then taking it and the sack of stolen food, Kabir returned to his home. There he told his wife everything and shewed her their son's head. She concealed her grief bravely, and taking the food cooked it for the pilgrims' meal.

Next morning when the sun rose, the pilgrims went to bathe in a neighbouring stream. As they went they heard

an uproar. The whole village was thronging round the grocer's shop, where the grocer was displaying the headless body of the thief. The wiseacres of the village were wagging their heads over the body and were arguing whether the grocer's merit had protected his wealth or whether the dead man had really been a thief. The grocer said falsely that he had surprised the robbers so that they had been unable to take any of his things away. Then taking the headless corpse, the grocer complained to the king. The king grew very angry and bade his guards impale it. The pilgrims returned to Kabir's house and bade him farewell. His wife, although weeping, prostrated herself before them to do them homage. Then both husband and wife went with the pilgrims to see them off upon their journey. As they went they passed near the stake upon which Kamal's headless body was impaled. Suddenly both the hands of the body joined together and moved upwards as if trying to meet the forehead. The pilgrims were amazed and asked Kabir the cause. "Can a bird," they asked, "whose wings have been clipped fly? Can a stringless lute play music? Does the headless body, do you think, still live, as Bhishma lived upon his bed of arrows?"

Kabir told the pilgrims all that had happened on the previous night. They went back with him to the hermitage. There Kabir's wife shewed them her son's head. Returning with it to the stake they took down the impaled body. They placed the head upon it. Instantly Kamal came back to life and fell at the feet of the pilgrims. The pilgrims in their turn prostrated themselves before Kabir, for whom the Lord Krishna had worked the miracle. And singing the Lord Krishna's praises, they left the village and went rejoicing on their way.

7. KABIR AND RAMANAND

One day as Kabir was walking through the village, he saw a woman of the bania caste grinding grain. He looked

at her steadfastly for some time and then burst into tears. The passers by, men and women alike, laughed at him, saying, "Who has been teasing you, Kabir?" But Kabir made them no answer, because he knew that they had no power to take away his grief. A frog does not ask for sympathy from a snake. A learned man does not seek wisdom from a drunkard. A Brahman will not bestow a blessing if a Mang is near. So Kabir would not waste words on the fools who mocked him. Just then a saintly man called Nipat came up and asked Kabir the cause of his grief. Kabir answered him freely, because he knew that he would understand. "I saw," he said, "the mill grinding grain and I realised that I was even as the grain in the mill of life. I wept to think that I had no escape from it." "Nay," said Nipat, "your grief is causeless. The corn is only ground when put into the mill. But those who worship Rama escape from the mill of life." Kabir was comforted by the saint's words and after embracing the saint went on his way weaving poems in praise of Ramachandra.

One day Kabir thought to himself, "He who has no spiritual teacher is like a lifeless corpse, or a childless house, or a partridge on a moonless night. I must go to the saint Ramanand." With these words he went to Ramanand's door and cried, "Lord, have mercy upon me." But when Ramanand heard Kabir's words, he stopped his ears with his fingers and fled into his cave. But Kabir standing outside the cave renewed his prayer. "Nay," replied Ramanand, "you are a Musulman. I cannot instruct you in divine knowledge. The wise man judges of the soil before he sows his seed." "My Lord," said Kabir, "I am not deceiving you. I swear it with my mind, my tongue and my body. As the lotus adores the sun, so I adore your piety." Ramanand would not leave his cave, so Kabir after prostrating himself before the door went homewards. As he sat at home one day, the wish came to him to hear the word "Ram" uttered by

Ramanand's lips. On the path from Ramanand's hermitage to the Ganges, he dug a cavity and lay in it. There like the chatak bird waiting for the monsoon to burst or the dry earth waiting for the thunderstorm, he lay and waited for Ramanand's coming.

Before dawn Ramanand came to bathe in the Ganges. As he went, his foot struck Kabir and he exclaimed, "Ram Ram." Kabir sprang up and throwing himself at Ramanand's feet exclaimed, "When your foot touched my forehead, you said 'Ram Ram.' I am now the happiest man in the three worlds. I am reaping my good acts in a former life. I am like one who looking for water has found rubies. I am as happy as a king when he first sits upon his throne. I feel as Maruti felt when he first saw Ramachandra."

Ramanand said nothing in reply, but went to the water's edge. He marvelled at Kabir's resolution and he resolved to test him by the touchstone of persecution. One day Kabir was walking through the village. As he walked he sang gaily and cried aloud that Ramanand was his guru. Ramanand chanced to meet him and taking off one of his shoes said angrily, "How dare you say that I am your guru? You cannot bring a single witness to prove that I ever taught you anything." With these words he rushed at Kabir and struck him on the head with his shoe. He was not however really angry with him any more than a mother is who punishes her child, or an owner is who brands his horse to cure it of sickness. A stream of blood flowed from the spot where Ramanand had struck Kabir. But Kabir shewed joy instead of anger. "Ramanand wanted a witness," he said. "Now all the village has seen him teach me. The earth, wind and sky are my witnesses." When Ramanand heard these words, he realised the steadfast heart of Kabir and going up to him placed his hand upon his head. And the fame of Kabir's saintliness spread all through Benares.

Some however envied his fame and murmured against him, just as the owl reviles the sun when it rises, or as thieves abuse the moon when it shows itself above the horizon. "Forsooth," they said, "ever since Kabir killed his son, his renown has never ceased to grow and the most pious of men now bow before him. Let us without warning Kabir invite to his house and in his name all the anchorites of India. When he sees the vast multitude arrive, he will run away and they will curse him." Weaving this plot, they sent letters to Hardwar, to Mathura, to Vrindavan, to Gokula, and to Dwarka inviting all the saints who dwelt there to visit Kabir on one and the same day. Then they waited joyfully for their coming, feeling sure that Kabir would either flee away and incur their wrath or stay and ruin himself by feeding them. When the anchorites received the letters, they bowed their heads and set forth to Kabir's house. From East and West and North and South came the great multitude. But Kabir undismayed bowed to each one as he came and then embraced him.

When the Lord Krishna saw the cruel trick played upon Kabir, he hastened to the saint's aid. Multiplying himself, as he did of old when he danced with the milkmaids at Gokula, he made himself into a thousand Kabirs. He washed the feet of one saint, he sang to amuse another, he gave betel-nut to another. For others he crushed hemp in water, filled pipes or fetched opium. Round one saint's neck, he put garlands. He sat talking with another. He anointed another with saffron paste. Then he prepared a mighty meal at which all sat and feasted, while a thousand Kabirs waved horsetails round their heads. Thus he satisfied the wants of every saint, just as in every pot you will find the sun's reflection.

When the feasting was over the Lord Krishna gave money and rich gifts of clothes to all the anchorites and then escorting

them in a thousand forms to the outskirts of Benares, vanished suddenly. When Kabir's enemies saw the miracle which the Lord Krishna had worked for him, they fell at his feet and said, "Though the moth hates the lamp and tries to extinguish it, yet it burns all the more brightly. The hatred of the firefly for the sun but adds to its glory. So we who strove to persecute you have but added to your fame." Kabir forgave them freely and he and they sang together to the close of the day the praises and virtues of the Lord Krishna.

8. PADMANABH

Once there lived in Benares a pious Brahman who had five sons, great wealth and a beautiful and loving wife. He fell ill of jaundice and sores broke out all over his body. He sent for astrologers, who said that the planets were angry with him and that he should soothe them by repeating their names. One Brahman said, "You should worship Khandoba". Another said, "Divide your riches among the Brahmans." A third said, "Learn by heart seven hundred sacred verses and you will get well." His sons also gave him advice. One said, "Spend half your wealth in building a temple to the Sungod." A second said, "You should worship Bhairav." A third said "Send for a Brahman and make him a present of an elephant."

The pious Brahman tried all remedies in turn. At last he said, "Cast my body into the Ganges, so that I may have rest from pain." His sons wept when they heard his words. Nevertheless they obeyed him and lifting him up, carried him to the Ganges. When the townsmen heard of it they crowded to the river bank. When he reached the river, the Brahman told his sons to tie pots to his arms and legs and throw him into the stream. Just then one Padmanab a pupil of Kabir came up to bathe. He asked why the crowd had gathered.

When he heard that the Brahman wished to drown himself he went to him and tried to dissuade him. "If you take your life," said Padmanabh, "you will never escape from any of the 84,00,000 births." "I have tried all remedies," replied the Brahman, "but my sickness will not leave me." "There is one remedy which you have not tried," said Padmanabh. "You have not repeated the name of Rama three times. That remedy is worth more than all your gifts of jewels and land, your self-mortifications and your medicines." The Brahman repeated the name of Rama three times and was instantly cured. He rose to his feet and prostrating himself before Padmanabh went to his home rejoicing.

9. BHANUDAS

Once the Sungod came down on earth and was born as a baby boy in a Brahman's house at Paithan on the banks of the Godavari. In course of time when the little boy was about five years old, his father began to teach him the scriptures. One day he was inattentive and his father scolded him. The little boy felt his father's rebuke so much, that he ran out of the house and into the woods as fast as he could. When he had reached the wildest part of the forest, he saw a temple in which was an old neglected image of the Sungod. The little boy prayed to it so fervently that the Sungod was touched and suddenly appeared before the child's eyes. "Be not afraid," said the Sungod, "think always of the Lord Krishna. And if any danger threaten you, I will protect you."

In the meantime the little boy's parents were looking for him everywhere. For seven days they looked for him in vain. One day a Brahman saw the little boy standing near the temple and told his parents. Accompanied by all the villagers, they went to fetch their son. They found him lying asleep with his head at the feet of the image. They embraced

him tenderly and then asked him how he had been able to live without food or water. "O, but I did have food and drink," answered the little boy. "A tall Brahman, who shone just like the sun, used to come every day to the temple and give me fruit and milk." His parents listened awestruck, for they knew that the shining Brahman must have been the Sungod himself. "I shall call you Bhanudas,"¹ said the little boy's father and lifting him on to his hip carried him back to the village.

His father tried no more to teach Bhanudas, for fear that he might again run away. But the boy never forgot the bidding of the Sungod always to think of the Lord Krishna. So day and night, he used to sing his praises. In course of time his father found him a wife, who after children had been born to them, fretted that Bhanudas spent so much time on God's service and so little on earning money. Hearing of this a friend gave Bhanudas one hundred rupees and bade him open a cloth shop. At the same time he made the other cloth merchants in the town promise to show him how to manage the shop. They agreed, for they pitied Bhanudas. But when they warned him to be sure and never tell anyone what price he had paid for cloth and never to disclose what profit he was making, Bhanudas said, "I shall never say anything but the truth. If anyone asks me the price I paid for the cloth he wishes to buy, I shall tell him." The traders got angry and said, "Beggary is written on this man's forehead. Of what use is it to give him advice." Then they went away and left him. But Bhanudas did not lose courage. He opened his cloth shop and whenever a customer came, he told him truthfully the exact price he had paid for every article in the shop. "Take it if you like," he would add; "if not, try some other shop." Then he would plunge into thought and murmur to himself the names of the Lord Krishna.

i. Bhanu is a name of the Sungod.

In course of time Bhanudas' fame for honest dealing spread everywhere, and buyers from all the country round went to buy clothes from him. All the customers left the other shopkeepers and flocked to Bhanudas' shop. The other traders were thunderstruck. They said, "This man whom we thought a fool has bewitched the whole neighbourhood. No one ever comes to buy from us. We starve while he grows rich. Nor would it avail us to imitate his honesty. Men would mistrust us more than ever. If a robber worships at a temple, no one will believe in his repentance. All will say that he is merely plotting some fresh villainy."

One day a Haridas¹ came to Paithan. Bhanudas asked the other shopkeepers to go with him to hear him sing hymns to the Lord Krishna. They refused. So he begged them to look after his shop while he was away. They agreed, but directly Bhanudas had gone they broke into his shop and taking all his cloth hid it in a pit. They then let loose his horse and drove it out of the village. But when the Lord Krishna saw their wickedness, he took the form of a Brahman and catching the horse led it back to the village crossroads and sat there waiting for Bhanudas' return. In the meantime the merchants were joking together near Bhanudas' shop and laughing to think of the face Bhanudas would make when he found his horse gone and his shop plundered. To punish them, the Lord Krishna put it into the heads of some robbers to break into their shops and drive away their horses.

When the Haridas had finished, Bhanudas walked home, his mind full of saintly thoughts. When he came to the cross-roads, he saw the Brahman with his horse. It neighed. He went up to it and patting it asked the Brahman how he had come by it. But the moment that Bhanudas had taken the bridle, the Brahman vanished. Just then the other shopkeepers came to learn that their own shops had been plundered.

¹. A Brahman who sings hymns and writes stories of Krishna.

They began to wail at the top of their voices. When Bhanudas came up leading his horse, they fell at his feet and confessed their crime. "We broke into your shop and drove away your horse. So to punish us God sent robbers to do the same to us. We are all of us ruined. What shall we do ?" But Bhanudas soothed them saying, "Now that the Lord Krishna has stooped to hold my horse, I must serve him always my life long. Keep my cloth and divide it among you. Take also my horse and all the money I made in my shop." So saying he divided his wealth among the traders and gave up the rest of his life to the worship of the Lord Krishna.

10. BHANUDAS AND KING RAMARAJ¹

Once a Brahman from Pandharpur visited Vijayanagar and sought an audience of King Ramaraj. At first the sentries stopped him. But after asking the king's leave they let him enter the palace. The king saluted the Brahman, who in turn cried aloud, "All Hail, O King ! All Hail, Incarnation of Yudhishtira !" The king asked the Brahman whence he had come. "I live at Pandharpur," answered the Brahman, "but I heard O King of your generosity and I came to Vijayanagar." The king smiled and said, "Welcome, reverend Sir. I am just about to bathe and worship. Come with me and afterwards I shall bestow a gift on you."

Now the king had built two wonderful temples to Parvati and round them he had laid out a garden. As the king worshipped, his musicians played sacred music and his Brahmans muttered holy words. He worshipped the goddess according to the prescribed rites. He covered her image with jewels and costly raiment. He anointed her with sandalwood ointment. He offered her the sacred food. He waved lamps round her to do her honour. Then he distributed the food

1. This is the famous king who fell at Talikota.

among the priests and turning to the Brahman said, "Confess, holy Sir, that you will not find a temple to match this in all the three worlds. Pandharpur must be a wretched place compared with Vijayanagar. The Brahmans who worship there must be miserable creatures. As for the god there, I have heard he has neither ornaments nor even proper clothes."

When the Brahman from Pandharpur heard the king's words, he grew very angry. "You think a lot of your temple," he retorted, because you have never seen Pandharpur. Your image here has silver hands forsooth: why, the whole enclosure of the temple at Pandharpur is made of gold and Vishvakarma himself designed it. Wishing Trees grow there in groves. Parisa stones and Chintamanis lie about like common pebbles. Kamdhenus graze in herds among jewel-studded Vrindavans. The Bhima river rolls down pure ambrosia. Rambha and the other ladies of Indra's Court dance round the Lord Krishna's image to the singing of countless Gandharvas. The mere sight of the temple there is enough to free the worst sinner from all future births. Why, when the Lord Krishna came to dwell there that he might honour Pundalik the serpent Shesha split his tongue in the vain effort to sing his praises. It is only because you have never seen Pandharpur that you dare to brag about your temple."

The king answered angrily, "You are telling a pack of lies, I have never even heard of this golden Pandharpur. I shall have you well beaten in front of my beautiful temple to Parvati and then I shall have you driven out into the forest." The Brahman answered bravely, "O King, I have spoken nothing but the truth. He who has never seen the sun admires the lamplight. He who has never seen Airavata marvels at the size of other elephants. He who has never seen the rising moon delights in the brilliancy of the planets. You who have never seen Pandharpur admire lesser shrines

like this one." The king grew still more angry and said, "I shall take you with me to Pandharpur. If it is as beautiful as you say, well and good. If not I shall punish you as you deserve."

The king set forth with an escort and took the Brahman with him. On the way the poor Brahman prayed to the Lord Krishna, "O Lord Krishna come to my help, I heard you slighted and to defend you, I spoke falsely to the king. But pardon me, and pitying me make Pandharpur as I described it. For indeed it is so, only men in this wicked age cannot see it as it really is. Come to my help, O Lord; otherwise I shall suffer some cruel punishment and your glory will be diminished by the laughter of the wicked."

When they came near Pandharpur the king called to the Brahman and said, "Now you are going to be shamed before all the world." With these words he dismounted and got on his elephant to look at Pandharpur. But his dazzled eyes could hardly bear to do so. Just as the full moon shines surrounded by the planets, so the temple of the Lord Krishna surrounded by the other shrines flashed back, as if all of gold, the sunlight. The king got down from his elephant and prostrating himself before the Brahman said, "Pandharpur is indeed as you described it." The Brahman was as astonished as the king and he silently thanked the Lord Krishna. As the king and the Brahman drew near to the town they saw (just as the Brahman had boasted) groves of Wishing Trees and Parisa stones¹ and Chintamanis² lying scattered on the earth like pebbles. In the meadows grazed herds of Kamdhenus³ and celestial birds sang songs never heard before by mortal ears. Near the river mighty anchorites practised penances beyond all human power and tulsi plants grew out of golden jewel-studded flower stands. Ramaraj went to the temple and saw Indra and a host of other gods in the court-

1. The Philosopher's Stone. 2. Celestial jewels. 3. Cows that have the power of granting wishes.

yard. Among them he recognised Parvati. She was sweeping the courtyard. "Great Goddess," cried the king, "you whom we worship at Vijayanagar tell me why you are sweeping the courtyard." "King Ramaraj," said Parvati, "I am only one of countless maid-servants who work for the God of Gods. You boasted in vain about the glories of my temple. For in all India there is no shrine like Pandharpur. And in the waters of the Bhima the other rivers come to purify themselves." When she had finished speaking Narada¹ and Tumbaru² came up and began to sing the praises of the Lord Krishna. King Ramaraj could bear the sight no more. He threw himself on the ground and hid his face in the dust. When he had recovered sufficiently he rose and entered the temple. But instead of the image, he saw standing in front of him, girt with his silken cloth, his eyes shining like lotus flowers, his face smiling on the king, the Lord Krishna. The king turned to the Brahman and said, "O indeed Brahman your words are true. In all the world there is no place like Pandharpur. The very goddess whom I worship at Vijayanagar I saw here sweeping the courtyard."

The king's words had hardly passed his lips when the splendid vision vanished and Pandharpur appeared as it always does. The Brahman said, "My Lord King, be not astonished. You have seen the real Pandharpur. What you now see is all that in these evil times men's eyes are permitted to behold." The king said, "I have wasted all these years worshipping Parvati. I have been like one who seeks for medicine on the shores of a sea of ambrosia or one who entertaining the Sungod seeks to kindle a lamp." He went close to the image and said, "O God of Gods, I want to take you with me to Vijayanagar. Give me leave, I pray you, to do so." The Lord Krishna answered, "I shall go with you to Vijayanagar and I shall stay there so long as you act justly.

1. The son of Brahma dev. 2. The chief of Indra's musicians.

If you cease to act justly, I shall come back to Pandharpur." The same day King Ramaraj had the image taken from the temple and carried it off to Vijayanagar.

Then how sad seemed Pandharpur without the Lord Krishna! It seemed like a body without life, or a stream without water, or the stars without the moon, or a wife without her husband. One day as the Brahmans were mourning the absence of their favourite god, Bhanudas said, "I shall bring back the Lord Krishna, even if I have to die for it." He said goodbye to the other Brahmans and went as quickly as he could to Vijayanagar. When he reached the great city, he asked where King Ramaraj had put the idol. But no one dared tell him, for the king had forbidden anyone to say where he had hidden the Lord Krishna. At last a man told him in secret that the king had hidden the image in a certain building, but that he kept the doors always locked with a guard over them. That night when all slept Bhanudas went to the building. At his approach the padlocks fell from the doors. The doors opened of themselves and Bhanudas walked in. When he saw the beloved image tears filled his eyes. He fell at its feet and taking it in his arms embraced it. Then he cried "O Lord Krishna, why have you left us? You promised Pundalik never to leave Pandharpur. Did we commit some terrible sin that you deserted us? Did you weary of our songs or were you distracted by the countless pilgrims who flocked to your shrine?" The tears came to the Lord Krishna's eyes as he heard Bhanudas reproach him. He returned Bhanudas' embrace. "To-morrow," he said, "when you worship me I shall again reveal myself to you." He took from his neck a jewelled necklace and gave it to Bhanudas. "Take it," he said, "and go back to your dwelling; for the king will soon be coming to worship me." Bhanudas left the temple. The door closed behind him. The padlocks re-entered the staples, so that no one could tell that Bhanudas and the god had met.

In the morning King Ramaraj rose and after bathing went to worship at the Lord Krishna's shrine. He noticed that the jewelled necklace was missing. He grew very wroth and said to his guards, " You must catch the thief and get back that necklace, even if you have to search the whole earth for it." The guards searched every house in the town. Then they went to the river where Bhanudas was bathing and saw the missing necklace round his neck. They cried, " We have caught him, this wolf in sheep's clothing ! " and putting him in chains they brought him into the king's presence and asked what punishment they should inflict on him. The king grew very angry when he saw Bhanudas and cried, " Take him away and impale him." The guards took Bhanudas from the king's palace. As he went he said to them, " I have only a few minutes of life left ; let me see the Lord Krishna before I die." It so happened that one of the guards was a just man and obtained King Ramaraj's consent to gratify Bhanudas' dying wish. In front of the image Bhanudas prostrated himself and cried, " Lord Krishna, why have you done this to me ? I but sought to take you back to Pandharpur and yet by giving me your necklace, you snared me to my death. Do not forsake me in this hour of my trouble ! " After Bhanudas had prayed some time, the guards took him away. Outside the temple they put the stake on his shoulders and smeared his head with red lead. When they reached the appointed spot, the guards drove the stake into the ground and lifted Bhanudas up to impale him on it. Bhanudas cried aloud, " Though the heavens fall, though the seas overwhelm the earth, though the hidden fire of Ocean consume the three worlds, yet I shall remember you, Lord Krishna ! "

Then a strange thing happened. The stake which the guards had driven into the ground, suddenly threw out leafy branches in all directions and on the branches appeared ripe

fruits and fragrant flowers. The guards took Bhanudas back to the king and said, "This man, O King, is a true saint, for the Lord Krishna came down to save him." They told the king what had happened. The king wondered at the tale and went himself to see the stake. When he saw it he said, "I have done a great wrong in sentencing to death this just man." He prostrated himself before Bhanudas and begged his forgiveness. Then he took Bhanudas to Krishna's temple and both prostrated themselves before the image. The Lord Krishna said to King Ramaraj, "To-day you acted unjustly. I shall therefore leave you and go back to Pandharpur." The king was silent under the god's rebuke. Then the Lord Krishna bade Bhanudas take him away. The saint lifted the image in his arms and carried him back to the holy city. As he went the Lord Krishna spoke to him cheering words, so that he felt no weariness as he carried the burden.

The Brahmans were sadly waiting at Pandharpur. They said one to the other, "Something evil must have befallen Bhanudas. Otherwise he would have returned ere now." Suddenly they saw him coming towards them with the beloved idol on his shoulders. With one voice they acclaimed him. They clashed cymbals, sounded horns, and blew trumpets to express their joy. They put the image in a chariot and dancing in front of it, they brought it back in triumph to the temple. And all the townsmen of Pandharpur rejoiced at the Lord Krishna's return, even as the townsmen of Ayodhya rejoiced at the return of King Ramachandra after he had taken Lanka.

II. KESHAVSWAMI

Once upon a time there was a certain saint called Keshavswami. He would wander from place to place singing the praises of the Lord Krishna. His fame so spread abroad

that wherever he went, young and old, learned and unlearned, rich and poor crowded to hear him. One day when he was at Bijapur, a great crowd gathered to dance and sing and make music in honour of the Lord Krishna. He sent one of his pupils, an aged Brahman, into the village to bring food that he might feed the multitude. It was late in the evening and the bania to whose shop the pupil went was fast asleep. The Brahman roused him and bade him sell him some ginger, sugar and flour. The bania served him the sugar and flour, but stupid with sleep gave him bachnag¹ instead of ginger. Thus all unknowingly he put poison in the saint's food, like a man who swears unwittingly when in prayer, or one who fastens a snake round his neck, thinking it to be a garland of flowers.

The Brahman took his purchase to Keshavswami, who prepared a meal for his hearers. Then the Lord Krishna, who knows all things, saw the danger that threatened his worshippers. Descending invisible from the skies, he sucked up the poison from the food and turned it into ambrosia, so that when Keshavswami and his followers ate it, they were at once freed from the pain of future births.

When the bania rose next day, he saw from the state of the sack that contained it that he had served bachnag instead of ginger. "What shall I do?" he cried, "I have killed Keshavswami and his followers. When the townspeople hear of my deed they will kill me and I shall go straight to Hell. In all three worlds there is no penance for such a sin as mine. What shall I do? I shall go and throw myself into the nearest well." In this resolve the bania left his shop. But as he passed through the village he heard no one speak of the poisoning. No one seemed to be in any trouble. He asked those who had been at Keshavswami's gathering whether they felt ill, but they all answered that they had never felt

i. Bachnag is deadly poison.

better, so wholesome was the food that Keshavswami had given them. Then the bania went to the burning ground; but there he could see neither corpse nor mourners. The bania exclaimed to himself, "Only the Lord Krishna could have saved his worshippers!"

In the meantime Keshavswami had bathed in the Bhima and gone to the temple of the Lord Krishna. There he saw that the metal of the image was all black. When the news spread all the townspeople flocked to the temple and gazed in wonder at the blackened image. The bania joined the crowd. When he too saw the strange sight, he told Keshavswami of his error of the previous night. When the saint heard the bania's words, tears flowed from his eyes. "Lord Krishna," he cried, "you sucked up the poison to save us, but it has spread through your veins and has defaced your idol. It is just as if Night had swallowed the Sun or as if sin had fouled the waters of the Ganges, or as if a demon had overcome Maheshwar." When the multitude heard the words of Keshavswami, they sang aloud the praises of the Lord Krishna until the roof of the temple resounded with their cries. The bania abandoning his house and his wealth, his wife and his children became for the rest of his days a follower of the saint Keshavswami.

12. GOMAI AND THE LORD KRISHNA

Once upon a time there was a poor Brahman widow named Gomai. Her clothes were all in rags and she had nothing to eat save what she could beg from door to door. One day she went on a pilgrimage to Pandharpur. When she reached Gulsara¹, the Bhima was in high flood and the boatmen were earning rich fees by ferrying the pilgrims across. "Who will ferry me across?" thought the poor widow. She

1. Gulsara a village on the opposite bank of the Bhima to Pandharpur.

tried to climb into one of the ferry boats, but the ferryman pushed her out and she fell into the water, wetting all her clothes. She begged all the ferrymen in turn to take her across, but they all said, "Pay us the fee, old woman, and we will take you across, not otherwise." She offered them a handful of grain, but they laughed at her and asked for money. But she had no money; so while all the pilgrims were ferried across to Pandharpur, Gomai stayed alone on the opposite bank. Weeping she said to herself, "I alone of all the pilgrims shall not see the Lord Krishna."

The Lord Krishna saw the poor woman's trouble and taking the form of a fisherman appeared before her and said, "If you want to get across, get up on my back and I shall swim across with you." "Good Sir," said Gomai, "I have no money to pay you. I can only give you a handful of grain." "Nay," answered the Lord Krishna, "I do not work for money. I only work to help the poor and the needy." Then Gomai said: "I am afraid of getting wet. The night is cold and I have no other clothes but these." "Nay," answered the Lord Krishna, "I shall take care not to wet you." So saying he lifted Gomai on his shoulders and before she was aware of it, both of them stood on the opposite bank. Gomai astonished asked the fisherman how he had brought them across without wetting either of them. "Nay; it is but a trick," said the fisherman. "I often do this for pilgrims who have no money for the ferry." Gomai in her gratitude pressed the Lord Krishna to take a handful of grain but he would not. "No," he said, "I never take any reward; give the grain to some Brahman on the twelfth¹." When he had said this, he vanished.

The old woman bathed in the river, worshipped in the temple and heard the kirtans sung. Next day, the twelfth,

¹. The eleventh is the festival and fasting day. On the twelfth the pilgrims feast.

she offered the grain, as the Lord Krishna had bidden her to various Brahman's. But one after the other turned scornfully away from the humble offering. "Lord Krishna," prayed Gomai, "how can I do your bidding ? I offer my grain but no one will take it." Just then she saw an old Brahman close to her. "I am a poor old Brahman," said the new-comer ; "today is the twelfth and I have nothing to eat. If you can spare me a little grain, I shall be deeply grateful" Gomai was overjoyed. She gathered some dry cowdung, made a fire and roasted the grain and ate it with the old Brahman. After they had eaten the grain, an old Brahman woman came up. The old man said to Gomai, "Roast some more grain for my wife." Gomai looked to see if there was any grain left in her bag and found that there was more than ever. She roasted some more and gave it to the old woman. When she too had eaten, both she and the old Brahman vanished suddenly from Gomai's sight. Then she knew that those whom she had fed were no others than the Lord Krishna and Rukmani.

13. LATIF SHAH

Once upon a time there lived a Musulman named Latif Shah, who passed his nights and days in reading the Bhagwat Gita and the Bhagwat Puran, and in singing hymns to Ramachandra. When the other Musulmans heard how he acted, they told the king of Bedar. The king grew very angry to hear that a Musulman had abandoned Islam. "Go, sack his house," he cried, "and then pull it down stone by stone." All those who heard the king's order rushed out to plunder Latif Shah's house ; but when they reached it and saw him sitting and heard him reading the Gita, they no longer wished to sack his house, but sat down by him and listened to the Song Celestial.

The king waited some time for those who had rushed off to Latif Shah's house. Then he rose intending to punish Latif Shah himself. When Latif Shah heard that the king was coming, he went and sat close to a tulsi plant and began to read from the Bhagwat Puran the story of Krishna. In a circle round him sat a crowd of listeners, and as the king heard the saint's words, he too sat down and began to listen. Then he looked round and saw that on the walls were drawn pictures of Vishnu's ten incarnations, of various holy places, and of Kailas and of Vaikunth, the heavens of Maheshwar and Vishnu. On the stand from which the tulsi plant grew was a picture of Radha and Krishna. Radha was putting a roll of betel-nut into Krishna's mouth. The king grew very angry. "Who are these ? " he cried, pointing to the picture. "They are Radha and Krishna, and Radha is putting a roll of betel-nut into Krishna's mouth," answered Latif Shah. The king grew still more angry. "A pretty picture forsooth," he sneered, "and why does your precious Krishna not eat it then ? " Latif Shah knelt and prayed to Krishna. "Come I pray you to the help of your servant. Take the betel-nut roll from Radha." The Lord Krishna was pleased at Latif Shah's faith ; and as the king looked at the picture he saw Krishna's lips open and take the roll from Radha's fingers. When the king saw the miracle, he prostrated himself before Latif Shah. "Glory to the God whom you worship," he cried, "and shame upon me ! For I persecuted you unjustly."

14. SANTOBA POWAR

Once upon a time there lived in Poona a rich Maratha noble named Santoba Powar. He owned houses and horses and elephants. One day he heard a kirtan of Tukaram. Then a great change came over him. He saw how vain was the world, how idle were worldly ambitions, how perishable was

the human body. He dismissed his soldiers and his servants ; he distributed his wealth, his houses and his horses and his elephants among the Brahmans. He cast aside his worldly cares like a snake that casts its skin. And putting on a torn loin cloth, he made his dwelling place in the woody island at the Sangam, where the Muta's and the Mula's waters meet.

Santoba's kinsmen were horrified at what he had done. "Our enemies," they cried, "will laugh us to scorn when they hear how Santoba has dishonoured the ancient fame of our house." They clothed his wife in her richest garments and decked her out in her costliest jewels, hoping that her beauty would tempt him back to his former life. When Santoba saw her come, he said, "Woman, why have you come to trouble me? Go back the way you came." "Nay ; I cannot leave you," said his wife ; "no matter what you do, you will always be my beloved husband." "If you are willing to stay with me," replied Santoba, "give all your rich clothes and jewelry to the poor." His wife obeyed him and taking off her clothes hung them on a neighbouring tree and covered her nakedness with a strip of cloth that Santoba gave her. When Santoba grew hungry he bade his wife go into the town and beg for food. She went from door to door crying, "Hari ! Vithal ! Hari ! Vithal !" until she came by chance to the house of her husband's sister. The latter ran out and embraced her. "Sister," she cried, "what has happened to you ? You who were so beautiful and proud, now walk along barefoot and in rags begging for food." With these words she went into the house and brought a quantity of food and put it into her sister-in-law's begging bowl. The latter went back to the Sangam island and told her husband what had happened. But Santoba made her take the rich food back and go to some village outside Poona to beg. She obeyed her husband's command. But before she could return home, clouds gathered and rain fell and the Muta Mula came down in flood. She

could not go back to the island where her lord lived, so she sat weeping by the bank and prayed for help to the Lord Krishna. Suddenly she saw by her side a boatman who said, "Lady, why do you sit here weeping ? " " I would cross," she said, "to the island where my husband lives." " If that is all," laughed the boatman, " get into my boat, lady, and I will row you across gladly." She trusted him and entering the boat in no long time stood on the island. He walked with her until they reached a spot whence she could see Santoba. Then he suddenly vanished. For the boatman was no other than the Lord Krishna himself.

About this time there lived in Ranjangav a Brahman who never ceased quarrelling with his wife. Even if she said nothing, he went on nagging at her and scolding her. He would shout at her, " I shall give up the world and become an anchorite like Santoba. Then you will be sorry for yourself." He had no real wish to become an anchorite. But he talked like this all day long, like a juggler who waves swords about although he fears to fight, or a cloud that thunders yet cannot rain. One day Santoba came to the Brahman's house and asked his wife for alms. She told him all her trouble. " My husband is like one demented. He threatens always to become an anchorite like you. Pray tell me how I may cure him." Santoba smiled and said, " When your husband next begins to rave like this, tell him to come to me. I shall cure him and send him back to you as submissive as a tame monkey is to a dervish." The wife promised to do so and gave Santoba his alms. Not long afterwards the Brahman returned home. He glared at his wife and shouted, " Why is my dinner not ready ? I am starving. If this happens again, I shall give up the married life. I shall become an anchorite like Santoba. Then you will be sorry." But his wife said, " Why should you delay ? Go now and become an anchorite." The Brahman gasped with astonishment. Then

he flung off his clothes and with only a rag round his loins and a pot in his hand went to the Sangam island. He said to Santoba, "I have come to live just as you do. I have given up the snares of this world and I shall live always as your companion." "Welcome," said Santoba, "I shall rejoice in your company, for there is no truer anchorite than you in all three worlds. Now take this gourd and fetch me some water from the river." The Brahman went, but as he went he grew hungry and tired. When he returned with the water he asked Santoba for food. Santoba handed him some berries picked from a thorn-bush such as he and his wife used to eat. The Brahman ate one. Then pulling a wry face he said, "These are very bitter." "Why not?" said Santoba. "I eat to live, not for pleasure."

After some time the Brahman, racked with hunger, began to weep bitterly. Santoba turned to him and said, "Why do you weep? If you still care for the pleasures of the world you should not have joined me." Then the Brahman repented. "I should not have quarrelled so with my wife," he sobbed, "but now I am ashamed to return to her. It is night time and she would drive me away as a naked gosavi." "If you swear to me," said Santoba, "that you will never again threaten to give up the married life and become an anchorite, I shall take you home and no one will know of your home-coming." The Brahman swore that he would never be so foolish again. Santoba rose and went to the Brahman's house. There he said to the Brahman's wife, "It is as I foretold. I have taught your husband a lesson. He will be as submissive as you please. He will come to you dressed only in a loin cloth. But do not scold him or drive him away." Having said this, he returned and told the Brahman to go to his house. The Brahman slipped silently home and ever afterwards lived happily with his wife.

One day Santoba with two thousand other pilgrims was going on a pilgrimage to Pandharpur. On the tenth of the bright half of Ashad, the pilgrims reached the spot where the Nira and the Bhima meet. There had been heavy rain and the Bhima was in flood and had overflowed its banks far over the country-side. The pilgrims were in despair. "To-morrow," they mourned, "is the eleventh and we shall miss our chance of salvation." Then Santoba said, "I shall cross the river by reciting the name of the Lord Krishna. The sound of his name will save me." He plunged into the stream and the water shrank until it barely covered his ankles. Thus playing on the vina and singing the praises of the Lord Krishna, he safely reached the opposite bank. When the other pilgrims saw that he had crossed the river, they also resolved to plunge into the waters. Then the Lord Krishna said, "These pilgrims are not saints like Santoba. My name will not save them and they will all drown in the rushing waters." With these words he took the form of the mighty tortoise on whose back the Gods placed Mandara mountain, what time they churned the Ocean. When the giant tortoise neared the bank the pilgrims crowded on it, high and low, rich and poor. They brought with them their packs, their horses, and their cattle. Then as the tortoise left the shore to cross the raging river, a song of praise and thanksgiving broke from the lips of all those whom it carried. When it had conveyed all across, it vanished beneath the waters. The pilgrims continued their journey and reached Pandharpur the same evening.

15. NILOBA

Once upon a time there lived at Pandharpur a saint called Niloba. Long after Tukaram, was dead, he appeared in a dream to Niloba and taught him step by step all that religion teaches. At last Niloba gave up all thoughts of this life. He

had a wife and children ; but he heeded them not, and devoting himself to the worship of the Lord Krishna spent his days in singing his praises.

One day he betrothed his daughter. His kinsmen asked him with a sneer, " You are absolutely penniless ; how are you going to pay for her wedding ? " His wife said, " Lord, unless you attend to the things of this world, I am afraid your enemies will laugh you to scorn." The day before the wedding an old Brahman clothed in rags came to Niloba's house. He carried a little food tied up in a bundle. When he reached Niloba's door, he said, " I am a poor old Brahman ; if you will cook my food for me, I shall always be grateful to you." Niloba bowed to the Brahman respectfully and said, " Why should we cook your food ? Stay with us and share our meal." The old Brahman at first refused. Then he consented. When the meal was over, he said to Niloba, " I hear that to-morrow there will be a wedding at your house. You have no one to fetch you water. Let me stay with you. I will fetch your water and if you will let me, I shall arrange for the food." Niloba gladly accepted the offer and threw himself at the old Brahman's feet. Next morning the old Brahman got up two hours before dawn and thoroughly cleaned the house and courtyard and carefully swept the floor.

Next morning the bride, her father and five hundred guests came unexpectedly early to Niloba's village. The old Brahman took houses for their accommodation and did everything for their comfort. For the old Brahman was none other than the Lord Krishna himself. If the Sungod is your guest, darkness will never cross your door. If the Ganges enters your cistern you will never be short of water. If Ganpati is your teacher, you will soon acquire knowledge. If Brahma-deva has given you beauty, you will not lack lovers. If Sarasvati is the writer there will be no faults of style. So if the Lord Krishna manages your house, you will be in need of

nothing. From the bundle which the old Brahman had brought with him, he fed all the five hundred guests. Time after time he gave them fresh helpings and pressed them to eat still more.

Niloba watched the old Brahman in wonder. When the wedding was over he said to him, "Pray, reverend Sir, tell me your name. I am deeply indebted to you." "My name is Vithoba," said the Brahman, "and now that the wedding is over I would go my way." "Nay," said Niloba, "stay yet another day and pray accept a garment as a slight return for your kindness." The old Brahman accepted it and put it on. Next day the wedding guests went to their respective homes. Niloba accompanied by the old Brahman went with them. When they had seen the guests as far as the village boundary, Niloba and the old Brahman returned. On reaching Niloba's house, the old Brahman entered the room where Niloba kept his gods and then in the presence of all vanished.

16. BAHIRAMBHAT AND NAGNATH

Once upon a time there lived in Paithan a profound sage named Bahirambhat, who was learned in the six shastras and the deepest doctrines. Many Brahmans flocked from all parts of India to hear his discourses on religion and language. Yet in spite of his fame and standing, he would not frequent the royal court. For there, he would say, it is impossible for a man to live at peace with the world. He would not even beg for alms but lived on gifts given him unasked and every day he would bathe in the Godavari. At midday he would go to the temple and eat the *prasad*; the afternoon he would pass reading and expounding the Puranas to the crowds who came to hear him.

One day Bahirambhat said to his wife, "You did not put enough salt in the food which you cooked for me to-day." His wife answered sharply, "You are sixty years old; what

do you want spicy foods for?" Her words affected Bahirambhat deeply. He said, "Wife, you are right. I am wasting my life. Henceforth you will be as sacred to me as my mother. I thank you from my heart for the good advice you have given me." Then he left her and went into the forest to live the true ascetic life. Suddenly he thought to himself that even in the forest his kinsmen would trouble him and press him to return home. "Let me break off with them completely," he said. "Let me do some act that will make them avoid me as an evildoer." He left the forest and went to the mosque. There he saw a Musulman priest. "Make me a Musulman like yourself," he said. The priest said laughing, "What has come over you, Bhatji¹, that you, a pandit of the pandits, should wish to leave your faith for mine? Still, if your heart is set on becoming a Musulman, I shall gladly convert you to Islam." "Do, I pray you," said Bahirambhat. "I have not found peace of mind in my own religion. Yours seems to be the one path by which I may reach God." When the Musulman saw how fully made up Bahirambhat's mind was, he converted him to Islam.

When the Brahmans of Paithan heard what he had done, they were furious. "A sharp word from his wife," they said, "was no reason to make him turn Musulman. In a fit of temper he has sacrificed his learning, his wealth and his caste." But Bahirambhat paid no heed to them, but just went his way. One day however, he saw a Brahman sitting by the banks of the Godavari. He went and sat by him and burst into tears. "What ails you?" asked the Brahman. "You became of your own free will a Musulman. What made you do it?" "My evil acts in a former life drove me to it," replied Bahirambhat. "I thought that in Islam I would find God, but I am no nearer to Him now than I was before." They talked together for some time. Then the Brahman

i. A common way of addressing a Brahman.

said, "I shall try and get you re-admitted to Brahmanism". He went to the other Brahmans of Paithan and at last persuaded them to impose a penance and take Bahirambhat back into the caste. Bahirambhat performed the penance and was once more allowed to enter the temple of the Lord Krishna.

The Musulmans were enraged when they learnt that Bahirambhat had once more become a Hindu. They went in a body to the Brahmans and challenged them to come before the king. Bahirambhat said to them, "You say that I am a Musulman, but how can that be so when I have holes in my ears?¹ When a man has sight how can you say that he is blind? When he has hearing how can you say that he is deaf? If you put sugar in liquor it does not lose its sweetness." Then he turned to the Brahmans and said, "You say that you have made me a Brahman but I do not know how you can say so. By making me do penances you have not effaced my circumcision. The moon may become full, but the mark placed by Gautama² never leaves its face. So I having become a Musulman can never become a Hindu again."

Confounded by his arguments Musulmans and Hindus left him. But Bahirambhat never ceased to ask those whom he met, "What am I?" And no matter what answer they gave him he grew angry with them. If they said he was a Musulman he would point to the holes in his ears. If they said that he was a Hindu, he objected that he had been circumcised. At last men gave him the name of "Mad Bahira" and whenever they saw him come near, they ran away.

One day a saint called Nagnath came into the forest where Bahirambhat lived. He was so holy that the apes

1. Hindus always bore their ears for earrings, Musulmans do not.

2. Gautama blackened the moon's face because it helped Indra when the god tried to carry off Ahalya.

dragging stones from the hill-side built him a hermitage. When Bahirambhat saw this miracle, he wondered greatly and said to himself, "Here is one who will solve my riddle." He went to Nagnath and asked, "Am I a Musulman or am I a Hindu ? Tell me." Nagnath had a staff in his hand and instantly struck Bahirambhat on the top of his head. Bahirambhat fell unconscious to the ground. "Now," said Nagnath, "we must drive all this foolishness out of him." Taking a mortar in his hand, he beat Bahirambhat into a shapeless mass of flesh and set fire to it. Then from the ashes he re-created Bahirambhat. Bahirambhat sat like a yogi on the bank of the Ganges. Nagnath said, "Tell me what you are, mad Bahira ; are you a Hindu or a Musulman ?" Bahirambhat did not answer. Then Nagnath placed his hand on Bahirambhat's forehead. Instantly Bahirambhat raised his voice and cried aloud the praises of the Lord Krishna.

17. JANJASWANT

Once upon a time there was a wealthy merchant named Janjaswant who had five sons. All his days he spent in singing the praises of the Lord Krishna. But in spite of their father's goodness, the sons grew up evil livers, who cared nothing for righteousness, just as the wicked Duryodhan grew up in the house of the Bharatas.¹ They hated the hymns their father sang and would say, "The old man is mad. He has ruined our business with his praying and psalmsinging. He is really our worst enemy, because he has certainly hidden his money so that we cannot enjoy it." For evil men hate the virtuous just as thieves hate the moon and the unchaste woman hates the chaste wife.

Day by day the sons grew more and more angry against their father, until at last they resolved to compass his death by

i. See *The Indian Heroes*.

making a false complaint to the king. They went to the main gate of the royal palace and said, "Our father has gone mad and is squandering all his money. Sooner than that he should do that, we wish you to take it. It will prove useful to you in times of trouble." The king was foolish and believing their falsehoods sent for Janjaswant. When Janjaswant came the king said to him, "Janjaswant, you are acting wickedly. You are squandering your sons' inheritance on beggars." "If to give alms to beggars is to squander my sons' inheritance," answered Janjaswant bravely, "then I am acting wickedly." The king got very angry at Janjaswant's answer, just as a hawk grows angry, when it hears a parrot talking inside a cage. He said to the sons, "If you wish it, I shall order your father to be killed." "We pray you do so," replied the wicked sons. "He is not our father but our worst enemy. Sew him up, O King, in his own well-bucket and throw him into the river." The King agreed and ordered Janjaswant to be sewn up in his well-bucket. Then, tying a stone to it, he had it flung into a lake near his palace.

When the Lord Krishna heard the king's order, he took again the form of a tortoise and supported Janjaswant upon his back above the water. The king gazed astonished at the miracle. Then Janjaswant cried from inside the well-bucket, "He who saved Sita from Ravan, he by whose power the sun and moon shed their light, he, the Lord Krishna's self, is bearing me up, so that I drown not in the water."

When the king heard Janjaswant's words, he so repented of his cruel deed, that he sprang into the lake and dragged Janjaswant to shore. There he tore open the well-bucket and prostrating himself at Janjaswant's feet asked for and obtained forgiveness. Then he turned to the wicked sons and ordered them to be drowned in their father's stead, unless they also could obtain his forgiveness. In an agony of fear, they threw

themselves at their father's feet. He, seeing that they truly repented of their sin, obtained the remission of their punishment. Together father and sons left the palace and as they walked homewards, they sang the praises of the Lord Krishna.

18. KING SATVIK

Once upon a time a great and pious king named Satvik ruled at Jagannath upon the Eastern Ocean. Thrice daily he worshipped the Lord Krishna and ate the 'prasad' blessed by the god. One day as the king sat in the temple, he began to play at dice to pass the time. As he played and laughed, he lost thought of all else but the throw of the dice. When the priest came to give him the prasad, he held out his left hand to take it. The priest got angry and went away without giving him any.

When the king had finished his game, he asked those around him, "Where is my prasad?" They said, "You held out your left hand and the priest got angry and went away without giving you any." The king grew frightened and said, "In my former life I must have done some great evil and now it has taken the shape of a dice box to torment me. I am like one who has spurned ambrosia for strong liquor, or like one who lets a wishing tree die of drought while he lavishes water on a wild date; or again I am like one who drives away a swan and cherishes a crow or one who digs for coal when he might unearth a treasure." He would not return to his palace but sat at the door of the temple. Then he said to himself, "I must punish the hand which led me into sin." He sent for his minister and said to him, "Every night when I go to bed a vampire comes to vex me. He puts his hand through the lattice work and frightens me to death. I want you to stay close to the lattice work and cut off the vampire's hand directly."

it appears." "Certainly, O King" said the minister, "I shall bring a sharp knife and shall cut off the vampire's hand directly it appears." In the middle of the night the king unperceived stole outside the lattice work and put his left hand through it. Directly the minister saw it, he cut it off with a single blow of his knife. The hand fell to the ground. When the minister recognised it as the king's he was beside himself with grief and terror. But the king came up and comforted him, saying, "You were in no way to blame. My left hand betrayed me and so I cast it from me." Then he put the hand in a palki and sending it to the door of the temple bade his herald announce to the Lord Krishna, "Hear, Lord of the world, the evil that I did. While I was playing at dice, my left hand tried to take the food that you had blessed. But I have cut off the wicked hand and I send it to you to do what you will with it." The priests took the hand and sprinkled fragrant powder over it and put it before the Lord Krishna. When the eyes of the image fell on the pious king's hand, it became instantly a sacred davana plant¹. This the priests planted in the garden of the temple. Then they brought prasad from the temple to the palace. When the king stretched forth his right hand to take the prasad, his left hand unknown to himself grew again upon his mutilated arm, so that when he brought his right hand back, he found that he had both his hands. The Lord Krishna had made him whole.

19. SENA THE BARBER

Once upon a time there lived a barber called Sena. Low though his caste was, he worshipped the Lord Krishna until he at last had pity on him. And because the Lord Krishna had pity on him, the baseness of his calling fell from him

¹. Artemisia Abrotanum.

completely. For when a muddy stream joins the Ganges, its waters become as holy as hers. When iron touches the parisa stone, it becomes pure gold. When sin touches the Lord Krishna it vanishes utterly. Thus when the Lord Krishna accepted the worship of Sena, he became even as he whom he worshipped.

One day when Sena the barber sat worshipping Krishna's image, the king's messenger came hot-foot to his house and bade him go the palace and shave the king. His wife gave Sena the message, but he answered her, "Tell the king's messenger that I am not in the house." She did so and the messenger went back to the palace. After his return the king sent three other messengers to call Sena there. But all received the same answer. Then an evilly disposed neighbour said to the last messenger, "It is not true that Sena has left his house. He is there inside, worshipping Krishna's image. Tell the king the truth ; tell him that Sena refuses to shave him, until he is tired of saying his prayers." The messenger repeated this to the king. Now the king was a Musulman and grew as angry as a monkey maddened by wine or stung by a scorpion. He sent for his servants and bade them seize Sena, sew him up in a leather well-bucket and fling him into the river. When the Lord Krishna heard the king give this cruel order, he at once took the form of Sena and with a box of razors hastened to the palace. Yes, he whom Brahma-deva and the other gods adore, he who is the source of all life, he who pervades the whole universe, he, the Lord Krishna, took the form of Sena the barber. He approached the king, bowing before him to the ground. Directly the king saw him his anger vanished. The Lord Krishna shaved the king with surpassing skill and then shampooed his head. The king was so pleased that he bade the Lord Krishna stay with him and be his barber always. The Lord Krishna smiled and rubbed the king all over with scented oil of the most exquisite

perfume. Then he put before the king a gold cup full of moghra scent. When the king looked into it he saw the reflection of Krishna, four-armed, crowned and in his royal robes. The king fainted, but the Lord Krishna continued to rub his limbs. After a time the royal servants thinking the king had fallen asleep roused him. "It is now midday," they said; "it is time that His Majesty had his bath." The king recovered himself and said to the Lord Krishna, "You must never go away; if you do I shall die of grief." "Nay, Lord King," said the Lord Krishna smiling, "I must go now; but I will come back soon. Do not forget me wholly." The king took a double handful of gold coins and threw them into the other's lap. The Lord Krishna took them and went to Sena's house. There he replaced the box of razors and poured the gold coins on the ground. Then he vanished.

Some time after the king had bathed, he called his servants and bade them bring Sena to him. "I shall die," he cried, "if you do not bring him. Unless he is with me my food has no flavour, perfumes have no fragrance, jewels no splendour." His servants were amazed and ran off to fetch Sena. They brought him by force to the royal palace. As he entered the king's room, the king rose from his throne to greet him, heedless of the smiles of the courtiers. "This morning," cried the king, "you shewed me in a cup of moghra scent a vision of a godlike figure with four arms, crowned and wearing royal robes. I want you to shew it to me again." Sena who knew nothing of the king's vision remained silent with wonder. The servants at the king's command brought the jewelled cup of gold and filled it with moghra scent. The king looked into it but could see nothing. Then Sena guessed the truth. He said, "It was not I who shewed you the cup this morning. It was he who dwells in Vaikunth, the Help of the Helpless, the Saviour of the world." The king burst into tears and falling at Sena's feet said, "Because of you, the Lord Krishna vouch-

safed to me a vision of his glory." Then Sena divided among the Brahmans the gold coins which the king had given the god. And amid the wonder of the courtiers, the king and Sena began to sing hymns in praise of the Lord Krishna.

20. JAGAMITRA

Once upon a time there lived in Parali Vaijnath a Brahman called Jagamitra. He lived by begging and in this way he gathered daily enough food for himself and his family. Every night he would sing kirtans and the villagers would flock to his house to hear him. His fame grew until men said that he was the Lord Krishna's self incarnate.

His just renown roused the anger of certain wicked persons, who plotted together that they might bring him to shame. Even so the firefly grows angry at seeing the sun and the village pond is maddened to fury at hearing the sound of the Ganges ; even so the hemp tree is wroth when it sees men worship the tulsi plant, and the toddy palm on hearing men sing the praises of the Wishing Tree. One night when Jagamitra slept after singing a kirtan, some of these wicked persons set fire to his hut. When he woke up, the hut was in a blaze, and as they had locked the doors, neither he nor his children could escape. When he saw that death was certain he sat with closed eyes and folded hands praying to the Lord Krishna. "I have no help but in thee," he cried, "O Help of the Helpless, O Father of the Oppressed, O Lord of Rukmani." Hearing his prayer the great Lord Krishna hastened, discus in hand, to help him.

The glare of the burning hut lit up the sky and the villagers hastened to see what had happened to Jagamitra. They found him sitting and singing the Lord Krishna's praises. Round him were his children and neither he nor they had been injured. But not a fragment of the hut remained.

The Lord Krishna had saved them just as he saved the Pandavas and their mother from the house of lac and as he saved Pralhad¹ when Hiranyakasipu cast him into the furnace. Then all the villagers bowed before Jagamitra and proclaimed him as the incarnation of the Most High. Then they said one to the other, "If he brings to completion his austerities and attains to perfect sanctity among us, great will be our fame and greatly will the Lord Krishna favour us. Let us give Jagamitra a plot of land in the village that he may live among us always." They went to him and told him what they wished to do. "Nay," he said, "I do not want your land; what I beg daily suffices for my needs. When the chatak bird is thirsty the Lord Krishna sends down rain. When the sparrow is hungry the Lord Krishna finds grain for him. He who has his favour needs no land. He who is in a boat needs not clutch at the swimmer in the water. When the sun is high in the heavens, who needs to light a lamp? What need has he of wells who lives on the banks of the Ganges?" Still the villagers insisted and gave him sixty acres of land. Then they ploughed it and sowed it themselves and when the corn was ripe, they gathered it and gave it to Jagamitra.

Thus many years passed. Then a new village officer came to the village. Without any cause he at once confiscated Jagamitra's plot of land. The villagers in vain reasoned with him. At last exasperated by their pleading, he said to Jagamitra, "You call yourself Jagamitra, that is to say the friend of all the world. Go out into the forest and get a tiger to come to my daughter's wedding. My guests will like to see it and as you are the friend of tigers as well as of everything else the tiger will be only too glad to come with you. If you cannot fetch a tiger, I shall know you to be a humbug and shall not give you back your land."

r. See Ishtur Phakde.

Jagamitra went out of the village and into the forest and told all his trouble to the Lord Krishna. At once the Lord Krishna came to his help and, taking the form of a tiger, went close up to Jagamitra. The monster looked so friendly that Jagamitra put his scarf round its neck and led it back to the village. The cowherds fled in front of them and told what they had seen to the other villagers. They shut the gates and peered down on Jagamitra from the protecting walls. Others hid themselves in their houses and sat trembling behind their bolted doors. Others railed at the village officer and said, "Your wickedness has brought punishment on all of us. Sahasrarjuna by persecuting Renuka brought destruction on the whole Kshatriya race.¹ Ravan by persecuting Sita ruined the demon kingdom. You in the same way have brought misery on all of us."

The village officer fled from the villagers and hid in a hut outside, like a scorpion hiding in a hole. When Jagamitra and the tiger reached the village gates, the tiger gave a loud roar and the gates fell away from their hinges and tumbled on the ground. Jagamitra and the tiger entered the village. He reassured the villagers and went straight on to the hut where the village officer was hiding. The wretch on seeing the tiger looked at it speechless and began to tremble all over. "Why are you trembling?" asked Jagamitra. "You wanted a tiger for your daughter's marriage and here is one." The tiger began to roar and lash its flanks with its tail as if about to spring on the village officer and his children. The officer's wife said to her husband, "Go out of the house. You committed the sin; why should I and the children suffer for it?" When the wretch heard his wife's words, he laughed in his

1. Renuka was the mother of Parashrama who cleared the earth of the Kshatriyas. King Sahasrarjuna stole Renuka's calf. He then killed Jamadagni the father of Parashrama. To avenge his father Parashrama killed all the Kshatriyas.

anguish, saying, "Even my own wife and children desert me." He rose and went out of the hut and throwing himself at Jagamitra's feet said, "Pardon me ! Pardon me ! You are indeed a saint and I falsely persecuted you. But do you who are truly the friend of the world pardon me, for I repent of my sin." When Jagamitra saw that the wicked man truly repented he went back with the tiger to the forest. There the Lord Krishna left the tiger's form and appeared in all his majesty and glory. Then embracing Jagamitra as a brother embraces a brother, he vanished from his sight.

21. NAMDEV

Once upon a time the Lord Krishna made Uddhav again take human form, that he might bring righteousness back to India. The great saint agreed and he became incarnate in this way.

There lived at Pandharpur on the banks of the Bhima one Damaji, a tailor by caste, who with his wife Gomai never failed to bathe in the holy river, and day and night to think of and sing hymns to the Lord Krishna. In spite of their piety no children blessed their union. One day Gomai said to her husband, "Go to the Lord Krishna and pray to him for children." "To do so, my wife, would be foolish," replied Damaji. "We are too old to hope for children. Prayers will not make the damaged seed sprout, nor make rain fall in the cold season. Prayers will not make the lamp burn without oil or wick." "Nay, my husband," said Gomai, "to God nothing is impossible. He who made the rocks float upon the southern sea,¹ may grant us children in our old age." "As you wish," said Damaji; "I shall go now and pray to the Lord Krishna to grant us offspring."

¹. The divine hero Ramchandra, the seventh incarnation of the Lord Krishna made a floating bridge of stones over the Palk straits to Lanka or Ceylon.

Damaji went to the outer gate of the temple and prayed to the Lord Krishna. Then he fell asleep. In a vision the Lord Krishna appeared to him and said, "Go to-morrow and bathe in the waters of the Bhima river and a child will be granted unto you. When Damaji woke up, he went home and told his dream to Gomai. Next morning he bathed in the holy river. As he bathed he saw a great shell come floating down the stream. He seized it and dragged it to the bank. He opened it and inside saw a beautiful baby boy. He took the child home to its wife and she, although not its real mother, was able to nurse it.

Damaji gave the child the name of Nama or Namdev. One day when Nama had grown into a little boy his father went marketing, so Gomai sent him to Krishna's temple with an offering of food. The little boy did not know that the image could not eat the food and that all that was required of him was to picture in his own mind the Lord Krishna, and while thinking of him to go through the pantomime of eating. Nama therefore placed the food before the idol and waited for it to eat. As the graven stone remained motionless the little boy thought that it was angry with Damaji for not bringing the food himself. So he said, "Please, please, Lord Krishna, do not be cross with my father. He really had to go marketing or he would have brought the food himself. As it was, he had to send me." But still the image made no sign. The poor child burst into tears. "Dear Lord Krishna," he sobbed, "will you not eat just a mouthful? My mother will scold me if I bring back the food uneaten. She will say that I did something which displeased you." Then the Lord Krishna took pity on the poor little boy's grief and entering the image ate up the food placed before it.

When Namdev grew to manhood, his parents married him to a girl called Rajai. One day she complained to Nama's mother that her husband would not give his mind to the

things of this world. They were therefore wretchedly poor. Her clothes were in rags and she was always hungry. When the Lord Krishna heard Rajai's words, he took the form of a rich merchant. He made Garuda take the form of an ox and placing on Garuda's back a sack of gold coins he set out for Rajai's house. When he reached Pandharpur he asked for Namdev's house. The townspeople pointed it out to him and then began to laugh among themselves. "Nama," they said, "has not enough to feed himself. What a grand dinner he will give his guest!" When the Lord Krishna reached Namdev's house he called out, "Good lady, come out I pray you. I am a guest who has come to stay with you." Rajai was in despair, for she had no food in the house. She did not like to send away a stranger. Yet it was of no use to ask him in, if she could not feed him. She called out from behind her door, "Who are you? Whence have you come? What do you want?" The Lord Krishna replied, "I am a merchant called Keshav. I am a great friend of your husband. I heard he was in need of money; so I have brought him a sack of gold coins."

When Rajai heard his answer, she rushed out and begged her visitor to enter and make himself at home. The Lord Krishna laughed and said, "Now you know about my money you have changed your tone. Indeed it has been well said that it is better to stay at home than to go visiting empty-handed." Rajai humbly excused herself and begged her guest to stay and break bread with Nama. "Nay," said the Lord Krishna, "I cannot stay. But tell Nama that a friend came to see him and left him this." With these words he took the bag of gold from Garuda's back and put it on Rajai's floor. She opened it and poured out the contents. When she again lifted her eyes to thank her visitor, he had vanished.

22. NAMDEV AND DNYANDEV

As Namdev grew, the fame of his piety spread until Dnyandev came to hear of it. He journeyed from Alandi to Pandharpur to visit Namdev. When Namdev heard that Dnyandev had come to see him he went to meet him and prostrated himself at the great saint's feet. Dnyandev lifted up Namdev and embracing him bade him go with him on a pilgrimage to Hastinapura. Namdev went first to the image of the Lord Krishna and obtained his consent. Then reluctantly leaving the Holy City he started northwards with Dnyandev.

When they came near Hastinapura Namdev began to sing hymns in praise of the Lord Krishna. As he went singing a crowd followed him and began to sing also, until the sound of their voices reached the palace of the king. Now the king of the time was of another faith. Angry at the noise, he sent his guards to seize Nama. When they had brought the saint into his presence, he drew his sword and striking at a cow close to him, cut off its head with a single blow. "If you restore the cow to life," roared the king, "I shall believe in your Lord Krishna. If not, I shall know you to be an impostor and I shall kill you with my own hand, just as I killed that cow." "My Lord King," replied Namdev, "give me four days and I shall do it." "Very well," said the wicked king, "I shall give you four days. But unless in that time you bring the cow back to life, I shall kill you myself." The king went back to his palace. But the guards made Namdev sit by the dead cow that he might work the miracle that he had promised. The crowd that had followed Namdev went sadly home, like farmers on whose crops a flight of locusts has settled, or a singer whose voice suddenly breaks, or a man who meets a vampire when seeking for treasure.

Namdev sat by the dead cow, its head in his lap, praying night and day to the Lord Krishna. For three days the Lord

Krishna made no sign. All night the people of Hastinapura gathered round Namdev to hear the hymns with which he invoked his aid. But when day came they slunk back to their houses, just as the clouds flee from the sky when the cold weather comes, or as moths hide when the sun rises, or as the army disperses when the king falls in battle. When the fourth day came Namdev was in great distress. "Lord Krishna," he cried, "come to my help or to-day I die." As he spoke the Lord Krishna stood in front of him. At the same moment the cow rose to its feet. "But why did you delay so long?" asked Namdev of the Lord Krishna. "Nay, the fault was yours," laughed the Lord Krishna. "You promised to bring the cow back to life in four days. Had you said you would bring it back to life in four minutes, I should instantly have hastened to your side." Having said this the Lord Krishna vanished. After he had gone, the guards noticed that the cow was alive and was walking about. They went and told the wicked king. He hastened to the spot. When he saw the miracle that the Lord Krishna had wrought for Namdev he threw himself at the saint's feet and asked his forgiveness. Then he bade him and Dnyandev go forth rejoicing on their way.

On leaving Hastinapura Dnyandev wandered through many lands visiting the shrines and holy places. Returning to Pandharpur they journeyed to Marvad. The road was long, the sun was hot overhead and they were both worn out with fatigue and thirst. Suddenly they saw a well. But its mouth was small. It was of great depth and the water was far beyond their reach. Dnyandev, however, had the power of making himself small. He did so and dropping downwards through the mouth of the well, he drank deeply of its waters and then returned the way he had gone. Dnyandev offered to fetch some water for Namdev. But he refused, for he wished the Lord Krishna to come and help him. It so happened

that the Lord Krishna was then at Pandharpur with Rukmani. Suddenly he felt his left arm throb and his left eyelid twitch. "Namdev wants me," he said to Rukmani, "he must be in trouble." Namdev began to pray to the Lord Krishna to come to his help. "Otherwise," he cried, "I must die of thirst." When the Lord Krishna heard his prayer, he left Pandharpur and reached Marvad with the speed of thought. Instantly the water rose in the well until it brimmed over ; and Namdev drank, rejoicing in the miracle which the Lord Krishna had worked for him.

Dnyandev and Namdev left Marvad and wandered to various shrines until they came to Avenda Nagnath, a place so sacred to the Lord Shiva that the priests called it a second Kailas. There Namdev began singing kirtans, first to the Lord Shiva and then to the Lord Krishna. The priests got angry and bade him and those with him go away from the front of the temple. "The Lord Shiva takes no delight in this noisy worship," they said. "If you want to make this hideous din, go to Pandharpur." "Nay," said Namdev, "there is no difference or distinction between the Lord Shiva and the Lord Krishna. Each is part of the other, like sugar and its sweet-ness, a spring and its water, a lamp and its light, the cloud and the rain, a jewel and its brightness." But the priests grew still angrier and forced Namdev and his followers to go to the back of the temple. Those with Namdev gradually left him, just as an army deserts a beaten king. Namdev in despair prayed to the Lord Krishna. "You," he cried, "who helped Gajendra, who saved Draupadi when Duryodhan tormented her, come now to my help and suffer not the wicked to mock at me." As he prayed a strange thing happened. Shiva's temple that had been facing East turned round, so that it faced West. And Nama, who had been forced to remain behind it, now found that he stood in front of it. When those with him saw the miracle they called back those who had slipped

away and all began with Nama to sing the praises of the Lord Krishna. Next morning when the Brahmans came from their houses they were about to ask Namdev angrily why he had not obeyed their order. All of a sudden they saw that Shiva's temple had its back and not its face to the rising sun. At first they thought that they had mistaken the direction. But when they looked at the sun, they saw that the temple had completely turned round. They asked Namdev the cause. He told them. They were abashed by the miracle and, after humbly asking his pardon, they too joined in the hymns which he was singing to the Lord Krishna.

23. NAMDEV AND THE BRAHMANS

When Namdev went to the temple after his return from the pilgrimage with Dnyandev, the Lord Krishna told him to give a feast to the Brahmans. "Unless you feast the Brahmans," said the Lord Krishna, "you will not reap the profit of your journey. You will be like one who has heard the Puranas read but has not pondered over them, or one who takes medicine but refuses to diet himself." As Namdev had no money to pay for such a feast, the Lord Krishna took the form of a Brahman trader. He first walked round Pandharpur to do the great shrine honour. Then going up to some Brahmans on the river bank, he bowed humbly before them. They looked at him in wonder, for although the Lord Krishna had taken human form, he could not wholly disguise his divinity, just as gold cannot be mistaken for brass, nor the Ganges for one of the lesser rivers, nor the moon for one of the planets. They begged him to tell them his name, saying graciously, "When we see your face, we feel as if all our sins had left us." "My name is Ananta," replied the Lord Krishna, "I am a great friend of Namdev. I am lodging in the temple and I have come to beg you to honour me with

your presence at a feast which I am giving." "With pleasure," replied the Brahmans and at once departed to purify themselves before the banquet.

But the Lord Krishna returned to the temple and related what had happened to Rukmani. "I gave them my name as Ananta," said the Lord Krishna. "They saw the radiance of my face. Yet their folly and vanity were such that they could not pierce my disguise." "Nay," said Rukmani, "how could men such as they attain to a vision of the Most High? To the jaundiced man even the moon seems yellow; all food is tasteless to the man stricken with fever." Then all her heavenly attendants came down from Vaikunth to help Rukmani prepare a feast for the Lord Krishna's guests. In course of time the Brahmans came to the outer gate of the temple. There the Lord Krishna greeted them courteously and led them to their seats. Then with his own hands the Lord Krishna served the Brahmans and pressed them one after the other to eat their fill. Nor was anything lacking to the banquet. Indeed how could there be when Rukmani herself prepared it? When the Brahmans had feasted to their hearts' content, they turned to the Lord Krishna and said, "You are weary with waiting on us, it is now fitting that you too should eat." Having said this they recited some holy verses and blessed their host, "May you be rich and happy always; and may you always shew us your favour as you have shewn it to-day."

The Lord Krishna then sat down and bade Namdev sit beside him. Rukmani herself waited on her lord. In the course of the meal the Lord Krishna partook of some food upon Namdev's plate. Instantly the Brahmans sprang to their feet in amazement. "What shall we do?" they cried. "Of what caste can this man be? He pretends to be a Brahman, but he eats from a tailor's plate. His appearance is strange too. He looks like no man of the four castes that

we have ever seen. His wife has waited on us, so that if he is of low caste, we are defiled. We have lost all the good done by us in our former lives." Another said, "We must not say a word of this to anyone. If during a famine one eats grain given by a low caste man, or if one sees a dog touch food prepared for a Brahman's banquet, the proper thing to do is to hold one's tongue."

As they were thus talking gloomily together, the Lord Krishna said to them, "Why do you look so depressed ? Here is my present for each of you." With these words he gave to each Brahman a tulsi leaf wrapped round a precious stone. The Brahmans, appeased by the gifts, explained their difficulty to the Lord Krishna. "We believed you to be a Brahman," they said, "yet you ate off a tailor's plate." "What shall I do ?" asked the Lord Krishna. "You must perform due penance," said the Brahmans. The Lord Krishna agreed. He first walked round the holy town. Then he went to the banks of the Bhima. There he honoured the Brahmans by walking round them. He bathed in the holy river, while they repeated sacred verses. Next he smeared himself with cowdung ashes and put a fresh tila on his forehead. When the penance was complete, he invited the Brahmans again to dinner next day and then returned to the temple, where he told Rukmani and Satyabhama¹ all that had happened.

Next day the Brahmans, impatient for their second banquet, arrived before the appointed time. The Lord Krishna had not arrived. So they began to grumble saying, "Yesterday, forsooth, he invited us to a fine feast ; but when we come to partake of it, he is not there." In a short time, however, the Lord Krishna came and prostrated himself before the Brahmans to do them honour. Then he courteously begged them to sit down to the banquet. The splendour

¹. Rukmani and Satyabhama are Krishna's two wives.

and richness of the feast exceeded even that of the previous day and time after time the Brahmans emptied the plates in front of them.

When they had finished their meal, they saw flowers rain from Heaven. They looked upwards and saw the sky filled with the aerial chariots of Indra and the other gods. In amazement they looked at the Lord Krishna. He had resumed his divine shape. They saw his four arms, the jewelled crown on his head, his eyes like lotuses, the discus that flashed in his hand and by his side his attendant Garuda. As they watched, his glory filled the whole sky, until Heaven and Earth seemed part of his divinity. The Brahmans threw themselves on the ground before the great god and begged humbly his forgiveness. He raised them to their feet and entrusting Namdev to their care returned to his heaven Vaikunth.

24. NAMDEV AND THE GOLD STONE

Some time after this, Damaji, Namdev's father bade him devote himself to business and gave him money sufficient to start a tailor's shop. With the money Namdev bought some cloth and on market day opened his shop. But as his thoughts were far away with the Lord Krishna, he did not answer the customers' questions. So they passed his shop by and bought their cloth elsewhere.

When evening fell the other traders closed their shops and gathering round Namdev laughed at him. "Go home, silly," they said, "the sun has set and there is no more business to be done." Namdev was suddenly aware that he had sold no cloth. He feared to go home lest his father should scold him. He spent the night in a rest house. Next day seeing some stones look cold in the morning light, he spread his cloth over them and went home. When he met his father, he told

him that he had sold the cloth to a certain Ganoba who had promised to pay the price next market day, and that a certain Dhondoba had gone surety for the debt¹.

Next market day Namdev went to the field wherein lay the stones. He said to one of them, "Ganoba, pay your debt." As the stone made no answer, he said to the other, "Dhondoba, as you are surety you will have to pay." As no reply came to this order either, Namdev rolled the second stone to his father's house and locked it up in the cellar. Damaji was absent but when he returned Rajai told him that her husband had locked up a stone in the cellar. When Damaji asked Namdev, the latter said that the stone was Dhondoba the surety for the debt. Damaji grew very angry. But Namdev going down into the cellar brought up the stone and placed it before his father and wife. Their astonished eyes saw that it was of pure gold. "Take from it the price of the cloth," said Namdev, "then let me take it back to the field." But neither Damaji nor Rajai would consent to this. The wife wanted ornaments. The father wanted to extend his business. They carefully stored away the stone of gold, so that they might use it as they wanted it.

The fame of this miracle spread abroad, until at last the owner of the field in which the stone had laid appeared and demanded it back. Namdev told his father to return the stone provided the owner of the field paid the value of the cloth. To this both Damaji and the owner of the field agreed. The latter paid the price of the cloth and wrapping up the stone in his turban took it carefully home. There he opened his bundle to shew his treasure to his wife. But when the cloth was removed the gold had vanished. In its place lay the worthless grey stone which Namdev had taken from the field.

^{1.} There is a pun here in the original. The Marathi Ganoba and Dhondoba both mean "Stone."

25. GORA THE POTTER

Once there lived at Tardokhi a potter Gora by name. So devoted was he to the Lord Krishna that he could not think of anything else but of him. One day when Gora's wife had gone out and he was kneading clay their child came crawling towards him. Gora, whose thoughts were far away, did not see the child and trampled him inadvertently into the clay. When his wife came home she asked, "Where is our son? I left him with you and now I cannot find him." Gora did not heed her, but went on kneading the clay seeing nothing but the Lord Krishna's image. Suddenly his wife saw the trampled body of her child. With breaking heart she cried out, "You have killed our boy. Your absent-mindedness has ruined us. I shall not live with you any longer. I shall go and kill myself."

Gora was very angry at his train of thought being interrupted. "The vision of the Lord Krishna," he said, "was before my eyes. Now you have driven him away." Snatching up a stick he ran after his wife and beat her. Furious with her husband, she cried, "I swear by the Lord Krishna, you shall never touch me again." When Gora heard his wife's words all anger left him. For he felt that now the temptations of married life would never take his thoughts away from the Lord Krishna. But when the villagers heard that he had trampled on his son, they came to mock at him and said, "Your piety has brought you a fine reward!" But Gora despised them just as Agastya despises the roaring of the sea or the Pandit the chattering of the imbecile.

For some days Gora's wife would not speak to him. At last she thought to herself, "It is not for me to punish my husband. Though their king does ill, his subjects should forgive him." So that evening she went to him and offered to wash his feet. But Gora pushed her away saying, "You swore

by the Lord Krishna that you would never let me touch you." "Nay, my Lord," said his wife soothingly, "I spoke hastily and you must forgive me. Pots in the kiln often strike against each other without doing any harm. So a wife and husband often say things without meaning them." But Gora grew very angry and cried, "When the sun rises in the West, when the wind grows frightened of the cloud, when death is scared by a scarecrow, then and then only will I touch you." When Gora's wife saw that she could not move him, she left him alone and began thinking. "I have lost my only son," she said to herself, "I can never have another if my husband spurns me." Then at last she thought that if her husband married again, he might have children by his second wife. So she went to her parent's house and told them all that had happened. Then laying her head in her mother's lap she begged her to give her youngest sister in marriage to Gora.

Her parents agreed and sending for Brahman's made a great preparation. They invited their kinsmen and friends and the marriage party set out blowing fifes and horns. When the marriage day came, the Brahmans held the cloth between bride and bridegroom and repeated some sacred words. Then they said "Savadhan"¹ and released the cloth. For four days they feasted; then the procession started, that the bride might go to Gora's house. But as their daughter was leaving them, a doubt entered her mother's mind. "I do hope," she said, "he will be good to our little girl. If he is not, we shall be the laughing stock of the village." The father called Gora to him and said, "Be good to our daughters; treat both equally well. If you do not may the Lord Krishna punish you." Gora replied, "I promise you I will", and started homewards. But on the way he rejoiced because, as he said, the Lord Krishna had released him from the snare of his marriage. When Gora and his wives reached home he gave them presents of clothes

I. "Take heed."

and jewels. But he made them both sleep in one room while he slept in another. At last his elder wife said, "Why do you not take my sister to you ?" Gora answered, " I swore to your father that I would treat you both alike. I have vowed not to touch you, so I cannot touch your sister either." Then both his wives began to weep bitterly. At length the elder wife said, " Let us suffer him patiently ; the Lord Krishna may perhaps soften his heart." That night when Gora was asleep the two sisters stole into his room, and lay down one on each side of him and each put one of his arms round her neck. When Gora woke up and saw his wives sleeping beside him and his arms round their necks he exclaimed, " My hands have made me break my vow. They have made me touch my wives." He sprang from his bed and fastening a sword to the bedstead struck both his hands against it until he had cut them off. When his wives awoke they saw that he had no hands ; they began to weep and cried out, " Now we are utterly ruined. You have no hands, so you will not be able to earn a living. We shall be laughed to scorn and then we shall die of starvation." But Gora reasoned with them, " When the Lord Krishna is our friend, how can we die of starvation ? He who has a parisa stone is not afraid of poverty. He who has drunk ambrosia laughs at death." In course of time his wives dried their tears and said no more.

When the 11th of the bright half of Kartik came Gora went with his wives to Pandharpur. He bathed in the Bhima, walked around Pundalik's image and then went to the outer gate of the Lord Krishna's temple. There he and his two wives prostrated themselves and embraced the feet of the idol. Just then Namdev began to sing a hymn in praise of the Lord Krishna, while Dnyandev, Nivratti and Sopana stood by listening. While he sang Namdev waved his pilgrim's flag above his head and bade the others do the same. But Gora could not because he had no hands and he wept

bitterly and prayed to Krishna that he too might wave a pilgrim's flag above his head. The Lord Krishna pitied him and in a moment made his hands whole. Gora cried aloud with joy. When his elder wife saw the great miracle she too began to pray. "Lord Krishna," she cried "give me back my child. It was through you that I lost him. Had my husband not had your vision before his eyes, he would never have trampled on our son." The words had hardly left her lips when she saw a little boy crawl towards her out of the crowd. She rushed towards him and lifted him up in her arms and embraced him with streaming cheeks. For it was her son. Then Rukmani's image said to Gora, "Now go home and be foolish no more. Think no more about your oath but be kind to your wives."

26. NAMDEV AND VISOBA KHECHAR

After Gora Kumbhar had recovered his hands, he invited all the holy men whom he knew to dinner. Among those who accepted were Dnyandev and Namdev, Sopana, Muktabai, and one Savata a mali or gardener. As they were sitting at the feast, Dnyandev said to Gora, "Out of the several pots which you have put in this circle, point out any that have not been properly hardened in the fire."

Gora grasped Dnyandev's meaning and took a hammer in his hand. He went to all the guests in turn and tapped their heads with his hammer. The first heads tapped gave out no sound. But when Gora tapped Namdev's head, he exclaimed, "Here is a pot that has not been properly hardened in the fire." Muktabai laughed and said, "A potter can tell at a glance the unseasoned pot. A jeweller can tell at a glance a false diamond. A doctor discovers at once the illness of his patient." All the guests then laughed at Namdev. In an agony of shame, he rose from the feast and ran to the temple of the Lord Krishna.

To him Namdev told his trouble and said, "Comfort me, Lord Krishna, for I have no other comforter but you. If the soil hates the plant, where shall it turn for solace? If the king oppresses his subjects, whom shall they ask for justice?" But the Lord Krishna replied, "Dnyandev's meaning was that no matter how holy a man may be, he must have a spiritual teacher. Otherwise he cannot attain to perfect knowledge. As Ramachandra, I learnt wisdom at the feet of Agastya. As Krishna, I received instruction from the lips of Sandipani. Do you as I did and all men will honour you."

But Namdev cried, "Let me stay at your feet, Lord Krishna; I have no need of further knowledge." "Nay," said the Lord Krishna, "you must do as I bid you. But I will concede this to you. I will test you. If you recognise me disguised, you have no need of a teacher. If you fail to do so, you must seek further knowledge from the lips of a guru."

Not long afterwards Namdev went on a visit to Savata mali who lived at Verunadi. One day as the two saints were walking together, a tall, burly fakir followed by a dog came up to them. He carried a quilt, a vessel for fire and a wallet. His appearance was so terrifying that Namdev thought that he must be Yama¹ himself. He ordered Savata and Namdev to hand over all the bread they had. He then ordered them to sit by him and share his meal. Savata obeyed with a smile. But Namdev, unwilling to lose his caste, fled, pursued by the fakir to the Lord Krishna's temple. There panting with fear and exertion, he told his story to the god whom he loved. To his amazement the image in front of him took the form of the terrible fakir and then resumed its former shape. Then the Lord Krishna, laughing at Namdev's terror, told him that he had taken the form of the fakir to test him.

i. The god of death.

Savata mali had recognised him because he had had a spiritual teacher. Namdev had not recognised him, because he had never had one.

Namdev, still unconvinced, begged the Lord Krishna to try him once again. The Lord Krishna consented and Namdev continued to stay with Savata mali at Verunadi. Some days later a gigantic Pathan armed with a spear rode up to them shouting, "Seize Namdev the tailor." Namdev thought that the Pathan meant to impress him to do forced labour. Calling on Savata mali to follow him, he ran away as fast as he could. Savata called after him, "I am too old to run." But Namdev never stopped running until he reached the temple. Then he looked round and saw the Pathan standing by Savata mali. Namdev flung himself at the feet of the image. "Save Savata!" he cried. But the image smiled and said, "Look again, Namdev!" Namdev went to the door of the temple and saw Savata coming quietly towards him. "Where is that dreadful Afghan?" asked Namdev. Savata laughed and said: "You have again failed to pass the test. The Pathan was but the Lord Krishna disguised." Namdev, deeply ashamed, begged the Lord Krishna to give him just one more chance. "If you bring Rukmani with you," he said, "I shall certainly recognise you." The Lord Krishna consented.

On the eleventh of the bright half of the following month Namdev met a cart drawn by a buffalo. In it were two small children. By the side of it walked a Musulman beggar all in rags and a hideous beggar woman, who wore only a skirt and who carried a pot on her head. As the cart was going from, instead of to, Pandharpur, Namdev asked the beggar why he had turned his back on the holy place. The Musulman answered angrily that that was not Namdev's business. Namdev repeated the question to the woman. She replied that she knew nothing of Pandharpur. All she cared about was her dinner. With these words she lit a fire and asked the man

what soup he would like. He told her to boil a fowl. She put a fowl in the pot, but she soon said that more meat was wanted. "Put in another fowl," said the Musulman beggar. She did so, but soon complained that it, too, did not fill the pot. "Put in the buffalo," said the Musulman beggar. In a twinkling of an eye, the woman dragged the buffalo to the pot and dropped it in. But even that, as she soon protested, did not fill the pot. "Put the stranger in," roared the Musulman beggar in such an awful voice that Namdev took to his heels and ran for his life to the temple. There sobbing and panting he told all that had happened to the Lord Krishna. But he only laughed and said, "Namdev, I have tested you three times and you have failed always. I was the Musulman beggar. Rukmani was the beggar woman. You must now go to Aundhya Nagnath and take Visoba Khechar as your guru."

Namdev was at last convinced and went to Aundhya Nagnath that he might find Visoba Khechar. When he entered the temple, he saw Visoba Khechar lying with his bare feet upon the linga of the great god. He spoke angrily to Visoba Khechar and said, "You call yourself a saint, yet you put your feet upon Shiva's sacred symbol. I can see what a precious saint you are!" Visoba replied humbly, "You are right. I am at fault. Move my feet to some other spot. I am ill and I cannot move them myself." Namdev lifted Visoba's feet to move them off the linga. But wherever he tried to put them down, he found another linga. At last Visoba said impatiently, "Put my feet down. I am tired and I want to rest them." But Namdev tried in vain. At last he saw the greater saintliness of Visoba Khechar and begged him to be his teacher. Visoba consented and for several months Namdev stayed at Aundhya Nagnath, learning the wisdom that fell from his master's lips. At last, when Visoba had taught Namdev all that he knew, he bade him return to Pandharpur.

When the twelfth of the month came, a number of religious pilgrims were feasting on the banks of the Bhima. A black dog came up and tried to get something to eat from them. Sometimes it snatched away food from their plates. At other times it licked their bare backs ; at last there was a general outcry against the black dog and the pilgrims vowed that they would beat it out of Pandharpur. It slunk away until it came to where Namdev was eating. Suddenly it snatched away a piece of bread and ran away with it. But Namdev was in no way disturbed. He ran after it with a dish of butter calling out, "Why are you eating dry bread ?" Then catching the dog, he sat down by its side and began to pet and feed it. The pilgrims laughed at him saying, "Namdev has gone mad or he would not share his meal with a dog. He has become like the sun that makes no distinction between the clean and the unclean." But the dog laughed and spoke with a human voice and said, "How did you recognise me, Namdev ?" Namdev replied, "Lord Krishna, because I have learnt true wisdom from Visoba Khechar." Then the dog assumed the form of the mighty god and vanished.

27. PARISA BHAGWAT

A certain Brahman, Bhagwat by name, had acquired the favour of Rukmani by constantly worshipping her and bathing her image.

One day, pleased with his worship, she revealed herself and bade him ask for a boon. "I want you, Great Goddess," replied Bhagwat, "to give me something that will always help me to keep you in mind." "Take this then," said Rukmani, and gave him a parisa stone. "Any iron you touch with it," she said, "will instantly turn to gold. So long as you keep it you will not forget me." Bhagwat bowed low before Rukmani and taking the parisa stone to his wife

Kamalja, gave it to her to keep. Then he fetched some iron and touching it with the parisa stone turned it into pure gold. Both husband and wife raised their voices in thanksgiving to Rukmani, saying, "There is no one like you to show pity on the poor and the needy. We were steeped in poverty and you have raised us to riches."

After their hymns of thanksgiving, Bhagwat said to his wife, "Say nothing about this to anyone. For if the other holy men were to hear of it, they would laugh at me." Kamalja agreed. And both continued to seem like beggars to the outer world, although inside their own house they feasted like princes and heaped up a great store of treasure. One day Kamalja went to the Bhima river to fetch water. As she was returning, she met Namdev's wife Rajai. "Wait for me," said Rajai to Kamalja. "Let me just fetch water and then I will walk home with you." Kamalja waited until Rajai overtook her. As they walked home together, Rajai began to tell Kamalja all that passed in her house. "My husband," said Rajai, "is lost to all sense of shame. He lets me go about in rags as you see. He cares nothing for the esteem of others. He will not work. He wastes all his days in worshipping and psalm-singing, while I and the children go starving." "It is a waste of time to worship Namdev's god," said Kamalja. "If a tree never bears either fruit or flowers it is of no use watering it. If a well never holds water it is a waste of labour to deepen it. My husband worshipped Rukmani and she rewarded him by giving him a parisa stone. Any iron it touches becomes pure gold. So we have quite a lot of it in our house." "But what is a parisa stone?" asked Rajai. "Come to my house and I will show you," said Kamalja, and took Rajai home with her. When they reached Kamalja's house she shewed Rajai the parisa stone and told her to take it home with her. "Change all the iron in your house into gold," she said, "and then bring it back. But do not say a word about

it either to your husband or to mine." Rajai took the parisa stone home and turned her scissors, needles and spindle into gold. She then went into the village and buying herself clothes, ornaments and rich food went back home as happy as possible. When Namdev came home for his midday meal, he asked Rajai where she had got the money to buy such a splendid dinner. "Why do you ask?" said Rajai. "You always say you care nothing for the things of this world." But Namdev refused to touch the food unless she told him. Then Rajai said, "Kamalja lent me the parisa stone which Rukmani gave her husband Bhagwat. Why do you not worship Rukmani too? Why do you waste your time worshipping Krishna, who never gives anything to anybody?" Namdev said, "Shew me the parisa stone." Rajai went into her room and fetched it. Directly Namdev saw it he snatched it from her and running to the banks of the Bhima river, threw it into the water. Then he sat down by the stream and prayed to the Lord Krishna. But Rajai sat in her house weeping bitterly. Just then Bhagwat came home and looked about for the parisa stone, but could not find it. He asked his wife angrily where she had put it. "You have lost my one priceless possession!" he cried. "Nay," said Kamalja, "I pitied poor Rajai. She was so poor, I lent her the parisa stone, but she will bring it back directly." "But I told you not to tell anyone", cried Bhagwat, beside himself with fear and anger. "Go and fetch it back at once." Kamalja went to Rajai's house and asked her for the parisa stone. "What shall I do?" said poor Rajai. "My husband came home and took it from me. But he is sure to bring it back after he has bathed in the river". "O, please get it at once," cried Kamalja, as alarmed now as Bhagwat had been. Rajai went to the river and found Namdev sitting with his eyes closed, repeating the Lord Krishna's name. "Where have you put the parisa stone?" asked Rajai. "Kamalja has come for it. I want to

give it back to her." "I threw it into the river," said Namdev. Kamalja came up at this moment and overheard his reply. She went back home beating her breast and telling everyone how badly Namdev had treated her. In this way the news reached Bhagwat. He also began to beat his breast and running to where Namdev sat, charged him with having stolen his parisa stone. But Namdev answered, "I threw it into the river. I felt sure that as you were a saint, and cared nothing for gold, you would set no value on it. If you do not believe me, I shall fetch it for you." With these words he dived into the river and brought up a handful of parisa stones. "Which of these is yours?" he asked Bhagwat. But Bhagwat could not say which was his and the crowd that had gathered began to jeer at both of them, saying, "These are a nice pair of saints with their parisa stones!" But Bhagwat took no notice of them. Amazed at the miracle which Namdev had wrought, he threw himself at the saint's feet. "Now I see my folly," he cried. "For the sake of my parisa stone, I was ready to sacrifice my future life. I no longer want it. Give me instead your blessing."

28. DNYANDEV AND CHANGDEV

Since the world began, fourteen Indras have ruled, have been dethroned and imprisoned to expiate their sins. One day Naradmuni came to where the fourteen Indras were imprisoned. They bowed humbly before the great sage. Then their leader, Changa by name, prayed to Naradmuni with folded hands. "Mighty sage," he said, "I have spent many weary ages in prison. Tell me how I can be freed from life." Naradmuni replied, "There is only one way by which you can get freedom. You must be born among men, for Death only exists on earth." Changa agreed to be born again, but asked that Naradmuni should give him as a boon the spell of twelve

letters, by which a man can separate his soul from his body. Naradmuni granted the boon and taught Changra the spell of twelve letters.

Now at Punyastambha on the banks of the Godavari there lived an old Brahman and his wife named Vithoba and Rukmani. They had no children and when a baby boy was born to them, they were beside themselves with delight. They gave the little boy the name of Changdev. When he grew up he shewed the most wonderful powers. He had merely to wish to go to some place and he was at once there. He had merely to bless a man and the man got whatever he wanted. He was master of the eight magical qualities, of the fourteen sciences and the sixty-four arts. When he reached the age of a hundred, Yama came to claim him. But by the help of the spell of twelve letters which Naradmuni had taught him, he separated his soul from his body and hid until the god of death had gone away. Then he rejoined his soul and his body and began a fresh life of a hundred years. He did this fourteen times and in this way he lived fourteen hundred years; and his fame spread far and wide over the earth. He dwelt in a hermitage on the banks of the Tapti. At his feet sat fourteen hundred disciples and every day, accompanied by his disciples, he used to make long flights through the air. One thing, however, he lacked. He had never chosen a spiritual teacher, for no man had ever seemed to him worthy to teach him. At last the fame of Dnyandev reached his ears and he determined to become Dnyandev's disciple. He sat down to write Dnyandev a letter. But when he took his pen in his hand he thought to himself, "I cannot address him as my son, because I want to be his pupil. On the other hand it would be absurd if I addressed him as 'My Father' because I am so much older than he is." At last he sent him by one of his pupils a blank sheet of paper. Dnyandev was then at Alandi. When Changdev's pupil gave him the letter, Dnyandev opened

it, but found not a word of writing in it. At first he could not understand it. "Changdev is fourteen hundred years old," he said, "and yet he cannot write a letter." But at last by his inner wisdom he grasped Changdev's meaning and understood that Changdev wanted to become his disciple. In answer he wrote a poem of sixty-five verses¹ in which he expounded to Changdev all his doctrines. When Changdev read Dnyandev's answer, he felt that he must see him. He mounted on a tiger's back and took a cobra in his hand as a whip. Then, followed by his disciples, he coursed through the air until he came to Dnyandev's hermitage at Alandi. Dnyandev saw Changdev coming and to convince Changdev that his powers were far less than his own, he mounted a wall and made it run along to meet Changdev. The latter was overawed by the miracle and dismounting the tiger walked barefoot to meet the mighty seer. They met under a banian tree, still known as the Tree of Rest. Dnyandev welcomed Changdev and talked to him for some time about the Lord Krishna and his greatness. But he would not take Changdev as his pupil. He gave him to his sister Muktabai to teach. And until Changdev's death he was Muktabai's disciple.

29. NARHRAI THE GOLDSMITH

Once upon a time there lived at Pandharpur a goldsmith called Narhari, who was a devoted worshipper of Shiva. Every day he would bathe in the Bhima and piously adore the Great God. Indeed so single-minded was his worship of Shiva, that he had vowed that he would not even look at Krishna's image. Indeed, he would not even look at the spire of the Lord Krishna's temple. He loved Shiva as the lotus loves the sun and he would not adore the other gods any more than the lotus pays heed to the moon or the planets.

i. This poem known as the "Changdev Pasashti" still exists.

Now it so happened that a rich merchant had vowed that if a son was born to him, he would have a belt made for the Lord Krishna's image. The Lord Krishna was pleased with his vow and bestowed on him a son. Both to shew his gratitude and to keep his vow, the merchant went to Pandharpur. When he reached it, he asked the Brahmans which goldsmith would best make him a gold and jewelled belt for the god's image. They all replied, "The cleverest goldsmith in all Pandharpur is Narhari." The merchant gave a bar of gold and a quantity of precious stones to Narhari and asked him to measure the image and make the belt. But Narhari said, "I have vowed not to look at the image. So go and measure the image yourself and I will make the belt according to your measurements." The merchant was astonished at the reply, but nevertheless measured the waist of the image and gave the measurements to Narhari. The latter made a wonderful gold belt all studded with precious stones. The merchant took it to the Lord Krishna's temple, anointed the idol, worshipped it in all the sixteen ways and then fitted the belt round the idol's waist. It was too small. He took it back to Narhari, who made it a little longer. The merchant went back with it to the temple, but this time the belt was far too big. He grew very sad and thought to himself, "The Lord Krishna is angry with me and will not accept my gift." Then he went to Narhari and implored him to go to the temple and himself fit the belt on the idol. Narhari would not break his vow not to look at Krishna's image. But he blindfolded himself and, led by the merchant, started to walk to the temple. As he went the villagers laughed at him, saying, "He is veiling his eyes like a beggar who has just seen a treasure ! He is like a sick man in front of a rich banquet." Narhari, however, went on to the temple and there the merchant led him up to the idol. When his fingers touched it, he raised his head. Although his eyes were bandaged, he saw as if in

a vision the form of Shiva. The god had five heads and ten arms. He wore a snake round his neck. His hair was twisted in a matted coil and his body was smeared with ashes. He wore a tiger skin. His throat was stained blue black. "Why, this is Shiva whom I worship!" cried Narhari. He loosed the bandage from his eyes. Instantly he saw before him the form of the Lord Krishna. His skin was dark. He had a crown on his head. The Kaustabha jewel hung from his neck. His vast chest tapered to a tiny waist. Both hands rested on his hips while round his loins was tied a silken cloth. In amazement Narhari shut his eyes. But this time he saw only Shiva. He opened his eyes and saw the Lord Krishna standing on a brick. Narhari saw how foolish he had been not to know that each god was but the manifestation of the other and he began to sing the praises of Shiva and Krishna alike. He then tried the belt on the image and it fitted perfectly.

30. KANHOPATRA

In the town of Mangalvedha about fourteen miles from Pandharpur there once lived a dancing girl called Shyama. One day she gave birth to a daughter whom she called Kanhopatra. The little girl was so beautiful that had Rambha or Tillottama or Menaka¹ seen her, they would have dropped their eyes in confusion. Her mother Shyama pressed her to go to Bedar and dance and sing there before the Musulman king and so sell her beauty for a great price. But Kanhopatra said scornfully, "I shall only be his whose beauty and gifts equal my own. All the men I have seen so far are without worth of any kind. Compared with me they are like glow-worms compared with the sun."

i. Dancing girls in Indra's Court.

One day some pilgrims passed Mangalvedha on their way to Pandharpur. Their banners were streaming in the air and they sang gaily as they went. Kanhopatra went up to them and begged them to tell her where they were going. They replied, "We are going to see the Lord Krishna who went to Pandharpur to visit Pundalik." "What is the Lord Krishna like?" asked Kanhopatra humbly. The pilgrims answered, "He is so great that even the other gods cannot describe him. He is all goodness, courage and beauty and the sun, moon and stars are all his handiwork." "Reverend Sirs, if I were to go to him would he accept me?" They answered, "He who accepted Kubja¹, King Kansa's humpbacked slave-girl, and Chokhamela², the Mhar saint, will not reject you."

Kanhopatra straightway returned home. There she said, "Mother, I am going to Pandharpur." Taking her lute in her hand and joining the pilgrims, she went singing with them to Pandharpur. When she reached the outer gate, she threw herself on the ground and cried to the Lord Krishna, "Dear Lord, I have come to take refuge with you. Please, please do not send me away." Then she placed her head on the ground before his feet and thereafter remained at Pandharpur his constant worshipper. One day some wicked man told the king at Bedar that there was a dancing girl at Pandharpur more beautiful than any woman in the world. The king at once sent men to fetch Kanhopatra to Bedar. When the men reached Pandharpur, Kanhopatra was singing hymns in front of Krishna's image. They said, "Come with us to Bedar or we shall have to take you there by force." "Let me but say goodbye to the Lord Krishna," said Kanhopatra, "and I will come with you." The king's men consented. She went to the god's image and prayed: "Dear Lord, I am yours, keep me with you. If you let them take me to Bedar, your fame

^{1.} Kubja gave unguent to Krishna when he was going to Mathura to kill King Kansa. ^{2.} For Chokhamela see *Ishtur Phahde*, p. 38.

will be darkened. If those wretches but touch me, men will laugh you to scorn." The Lord Krishna took pity on the beautiful girl and freeing her spirit from her body united it with his own.

The priests saw Kanhopatra's body lying lifeless at the Lord Krishna's feet, so they buried it to the south of the temple. Instantly there sprang up from the grave a tall, strange tree.

The king's men waited for a long time. Then they entered the temple and asked where Kanhopatra was. The priests answered, "She is dead." "Shew us then her body," said the messengers. "Her body has become a tree," answered the priests, "so we cannot shew it to you." Then the king's men got very angry and exclaiming that the priests had hidden the girl in some secret room, took them away to Bedar. The priests went trembling into the king's presence and offered him cocoanuts and flowers. The king opened one of the cocoanuts and found inside a lock of curly hair. He grew very angry and asked the priests the meaning of it. They thought for a moment and said, "The lock of curly hair is the Lord Krishna's. He put it in the cocoanut to shew that he has taken Kanhopatra to himself. Come with us to Pandharpur and see for yourself whether the lock of hair is not the Lord Krishna's. If it is not, punish us in any way you please." "But how could your god take Kanhopatra to himself?" asked the king. "Her spirit mingled with his," answered the priests, "just as salt mingles with the sea."

The king in a great rage started for Pandharpur, taking the priests with him. As they went the priests prayed to the Lord Krishna to help them. "Save us," they cried, "you who saved from the rain the cows and the cowherds¹." When they reached the Lord Krishna's temple, the priests prostrated

1. Krishna when a little boy held up Govardhan mountain on his finger to keep the rain off the cows and the cowherds.

themselves before his image. As the king looked, he saw the god appear in all his glory. His eyes were like lotuses. On his brow was a golden diadem and under the crown were dark, curling locks, exactly like the lock which the king had found in the cocoanut given him by the priests. The king, amazed at the vision, threw himself prostrate before the great god and cried, "How fortunate was Kanhopatra that you took her to yourself. How great was my wickedness when I sought to persecute her!" Then he asked the priests where the strange tree was that had grown from Kanhopatra's grave. They shewed it to him and he returned wondering to Bedar. But the tree still remains and is worshipped by pilgrims to this day.

31. ROHIDAS THE SHOE-MAKER

Once upon a time there lived at Pandharpur a most pious shoe-maker named Rohidas. Every morning he first broke his fast, so that he might meditate the more easily on the excellence of the Lord Krishna; for one should assuage one's hunger before one begins one's meditation, just as one who digs for treasure should first offer a fowl to the evil spirit that guards it. After Rohidas had broken his fast, he would bathe and then worship with concentrated thought the Lord Krishna.

One day as he was worshipping the Lord Krishna, a Brahman came up to him and said, "Your worship will avail you nothing. All your utensils are made of hide. Hide pollutes everything it touches." "But," said Rohidas, "drums are made of hide, yet on them we play hymns to the Lord Krishna. Your hands are covered with hide yet you feed yourself with them." "Wherever there is life there is no corruption," answered the Brahman. "But the Lord Krishna pervades everything dead or alive," pleaded Rohidas. "And

where he is there can be no corruption." The Brahman lost all patience and said, "You are a fool to talk like that to a Brahman. Just as the Lord Krishna is the greatest of all gods, so the Brahmans are the greatest among castes. They alone are entitled to wear the sacred thread and their prayers alone are acceptable to the Lord Krishna." "But," said Rohidas, "I too wear a sacred thread." With these words he took his knife for cutting leather and cut open his stomach. Inside it was a sacred thread which he shewed to the Brahman. The Brahman was dumbfounded and said, "You are indeed a true saint and the Lord Krishna hears your prayers, whether your utensils are made of hide or not. By scolding you I brought out your true greatness, just as gold is tested by the fire and the scent of sandalwood is spread abroad when the wood is ground to powder." With these words the Brahman saluted Rohidas and went to his own dwelling.

32. MIRABAI

Once upon a time in holy Udepur there ruled a saintly king. Every day he held twelve services in honour of the Lord Krishna. Then he would clothe his image with rich raiment and costly jewels. He had a jewelled banner made for the idol's hand. Round its neck he threw a priceless necklace, and round its loins he tied a silk pitambar.

In course of time his queen bore him a lovely little baby girl. The king took her when only a day old and laid her at the feet of the Lord Krishna's image. On the 12th day he gave her the name of Mirabai. When the baby girl grew into a little maid she began to worship the Lord Krishna so ardently, that at last thoughts of him wholly filled her mind and she vowed that he and he only would be her husband.

One day the king her father said in their daughter's presence to the queen, "Mirabai is growing fast ; we must think of a good husband for her." But the little princess answered, "Nay, my father ; I have already chosen my husband. My husband is the Lord Krishna. Give me his image and think no more about my marriage." The king replied with a smile, "You are a silly little girl. The Lord Krishna's image is only a block of stone. He can never be your husband. This is now the Kaliyuga and the Lord Krishna no longer reveals himself to men." "Nay," said the little princess, "the Lord Krishna revealed himself to Chokhamela ; why should he not reveal himself to me ?" The king was too fond of Mirabai to thwart her, so he said, "Very well, my daughter. The Lord Krishna's image is yours. Take him away with you if you want him." Mirabai was delighted and had the stone image conveyed to her rooms. There she worshipped it in all the different ways and the king supplied her with the materials for her worship. Every morning she rose early and sang to it, playing the while on her vina.¹ Next she rubbed its limbs with perfumed oil and poured over it milk and curds and ghee, honey and sugar, and bathed it in hot water. Then she rubbed it dry and clad it in fine raiment, put a crown on its head and a three-pronged tila on its forehead. Next she threw over its head a kaustubha or necklace, put on its hands and feet bangles, placed round its neck a garland of tulsi blossoms and sprinkled scent all over it, so that the whole palace was fragrant with the perfume. She offered it rich dishes and then distributed them among saints whom she had invited to recite legends and sing the praises of the Lord Krishna. But just as crows try to pick holes in a cow's back, so evil-minded men in Udepur tried to find wickedness in Mirabai's conduct. "This is a fine princess !" they would say. "She is lost to all shame. Instead of living in

i. A kind of lute or guitar.

seclusion she spends her days toying with wandering beggars. The king is harsh enough to us, if we ever stray from the path of duty. Yet, blind fool that he is, he takes no heed of his daughter's conduct ! ”

When the king came to hear what his people said, he went to his wife and told her. He bade her also tell Mirabai that she must no longer be the talk of the place, but must prepare to take a husband. The queen did as the king bade her. But the princess only said, “ I shall never wed anyone but the Lord Krishna. Why should the king care what the evil-minded say ? If he could see into my heart he would know that it is pure.” The queen went back to the king and told him Mirabai’s answer. The king got very angry. “ If she will not wed,” he said, “ she must die. Such a daughter brings dishonour on our house. Her death is better than our dishonour.” The king had poison brought and poured it into a cup and told the queen to give it to Mirabai. The queen would not disobey her lord. But she walked weeping to the princess’ rooms, for her mother’s heart was nigh to breaking. She found Mirabai before the Lord Krishna’s image and gave her the poisoned cup. “ Drink it,” she said ; “ it is your father’s order.” Then she burst into tears and cried, “ My beautiful child, how can I bear to see you die ? ”

The princess embraced her mother tenderly. “ Do not weep,” she said softly. “ Life is but a mirage. Why should you weep if the mirage vanishes ? When I die the Lord Krishna will take me to him and I shall dwell in his arms, like a jewel in its golden setting.” Then she threw herself at the feet of the image and cried, “ One thing only troubles me, Lord Krishna. When I am gone who will worship you ? The king will hate you. For he will say that it was through you that he lost his daughter. The townspeople will shun you. They will say that it was through worshipping you that Mirabai perished. But why should I trouble myself in

vain? You are the Lord of the world and will overcome all difficulties." She put the cup of poison at the feet of the image as a naivedya offering. Then she drank its contents, repeating as she did so the name of the Lord Krishna. To her mother's wonder it had no effect on her. But the image changed instantly from black to a hideous green. The queen ran and told the king. The king could not believe the story and came himself to see the image. When he saw it disfigured, he was overcome with remorse and threw himself at Mirabai's feet. "In my wickedness," he cried, "I have poisoned the Lord Krishna. Pray to him, my daughter, that he restore to the image its proper colour." Mirabai lifted her father to his feet and then with clasped hands began to pray. "Shri Krishna," she cried, "how can you be hurt by poison? You overcame the snake king Kaliya in spite of his poisonous fangs. Pain left the Lord Shiva's throat the moment that he breathed your name¹. Therefore restore your image to its former state." When Mirabai had finished praying, the image grew gradually darker until it was no longer green but jet-black. But that the fame of the miracle should not die, a green patch remained on the neck of the image. And to this day that image of the Lord Krishna with the green mark on its neck may be seen in the holy city of Udepur.

33. KING PIPAJI AND THE TIGER

Once there ruled at Gademandal a very saintly king called Pipaji who was devoted to the worship of the goddess Parvati. Her he would worship without ceasing night and day. He would wave lamps round her, he would offer her ghee and fruit and betel-nut and walk round and round her image.

^{1.} This was when Shiva saved the world by drinking the poison that guarded the Ambrosia jar. See *Tales from the Indian Epics*.

One morning the king entered Parvati's temple and offered food to the goddess. "A band of pilgrims," she said, "has just entered the town. I cannot accept food while they are fasting." The king, enchanted with the vision, hailed Parvati as the greatest of the Immortals. "Nay," said Parvati, "I am not the greatest of the Immortals. He who dwells in the sea of milk, who gave their light to the sun and moon, the spouse of Rukmani, the Lord Krishna, he is the greatest of all gods." The king threw himself at Parvati's feet and cried, "Great Goddess, how shall I attain to a vision of the Lord Krishna?" Parvati answered, "Go and meet the pilgrims, give them a rich banquet and they will tell you how you may attain to a vision of the Lord Krishna."

The king left Parvati's temple and going to the gate of the town saw a band of holy men who were approaching it. As they came they sang hymns in praise of the Lord Krishna. The king bowed low before them and bade them feast in his palace. After they had feasted royally he gave them betel-nut and with his own hands put tulsi garlands round their necks. Then standing before them with clasped hands, he said, "Tell me, holy Sirs, how I may attain to a vision of the Lord Krishna." They bade him desist from the worship of Parvati and go to Ramanand, and entering his hermitage learn the holy sciences from him. The king flung aside his rich robes and jewels and divided them among the Brahmans of his kingdom. His queen divided her treasures among the Brahmans' wives. And, dressed like penniless pilgrims, the king and queen set out for Benares to seek wisdom from Ramanand.

Ramanand received them as pupils and treated them just as he treated his other pupils. For the true saint makes no difference between the king and the beggar, just as the moon shines equally upon the thief and the partridge. When Ramanand had taught the king and the queen full knowledge

of the Lord Krishna, he bade them go to Dwarka and see the holy spot where he had lived on earth. The king and the queen bowed their heads to Ramanand's feet and went to Dwarka. They bathed in the Gomti river, they prostrated themselves before the outer gate and entering the temple worshipped the Lord Krishna. "Pardon me, Lord Krishna," cried the king, "for worshipping Parvati instead of you. I was like one who threw away ambrosia, that he might treasure a cup of water. I neglected the sun and honoured the firefly. I watered a toddy plant and let the pipal tree die of drought." The king had hardly finished his prayer, when with four arms, crowned with a diadem glittering with jewels, the Lord Krishna revealed himself to both king and queen. He embraced them both and bade them return to Gademandal.

Obeying his order, they turned their faces homewards. As they walked through a thick wood, the queen saw a huge tiger that lay in wait for them. She told her husband but he answered, "Fear not; for he who has the Lord Krishna's favour is safe from every beast of the forest." Suddenly the tiger rushed towards them and stopped, ready to spring, a few paces from them. King Pipaji walked up to the raging beast and placing his hand on its head said, "From henceforth worship the Lord Krishna night and day." Instantly the tiger fell at king Pipaji's feet and implored his pardon. The king reassured it and placing a tulsi garland round its neck taught it to repeat the names of the Lord Krishna and of his other incarnation Ram. The tiger with folded paws grovelled before the king, then bowing with all its limbs it said, "My sins were many, but the Lord Krishna has made me repent of them. From this day forth I shall sin no more." King Pipaji and his queen went on their way until they reached their own kingdom. But the tiger repenting of its sins gave up taking life or eating flesh, and roamed about the

forest singing the praises of the Lord Krishna. This it did for seven days, growing gradually weaker and weaker. At last it died repeating the great god's name. As a reward for its piety it was born again as Narsi Mehta, the great saint of Junagad.

34. NARSI MEHTA

Now the tiger which king Pipaji had met in the forest was not an ordinary tiger but was really an incarnation of the god Shiva. The great god one day had been looking at a tiger's skin and as he looked at it and thought of it, his spirit passed into the body of a tiger. This was the animal which had lain in wait for king Pipaji and his queen.

As a result of its repentance it was born again in the family of a Nagar Brahman of Junagad. His parents gave their baby boy the name of Narsi Mehta, but when he was seven years old a fatal sickness carried off both of them and left him an orphan to the care of one of his cousins. As he grew in stature, he came to excel in all manly sports but never gave a passing thought to the Lord Krishna. One day, after he had spent several hours at play, he ran home and asked his cousin's wife for water. She turned on him angrily and said, "You are a lazy lout; you never do any work. Instead of playing you should try to learn something. You have done nothing but eat us out of house and home since my husband took you in."

These words affected Narsi Mehta so much, that he ran into the woods until he came to a temple of Shiva. There he flung himself down upon the linga, resolved never to return home, but to stay in the temple until death released him from his sorrows. When he had lain like this for seven days and nights praying always to the god Shiva, the great god at last had pity on him and appeared before him in all his glory.

Five-faced and ten-armed, he wore a cobra round his neck. His matted hair was gathered in a tawny coil. His body was besmeared with ashes. He bade Narsi Mehta ask him a boon. The boy told the god to give him whatever he himself liked best. "Then I shall give you a sight of the Lord Krishna dancing with the milkmaids on the banks of the Yamuna. For that is what I like best in all the world." With these words the god Shiva dressed Narsi Mehta in the dress of a milkmaid and with the speed of thought took him to the banks of the Yamuna.

Narsi Mehta found himself in the midst of a beautiful glade full of wild flowers and shaded by gigantic trees, while the whole air was fragrant with the scent of jasmine and roses and champaka flowers. Close by were orchards of mangoes, plantains and pomegranates, while little streams chattered and played upon their way to join the Yamuna. Suddenly the Lord Krishna himself appeared and blew a blast upon his horn. From every thicket in the wood rushed forward maids fairer than any that Narsi Mehta had ever seen and threw themselves on the ground to kiss the Lord Krishna's feet. But beautiful as they were, the beauty of the Lord Krishna far outshone theirs. Round his waist was a bright robe of yellow silk which shone resplendent against the rich dark colour of his skin. His eyes were like the petals of lotus flowers. Above them were eyebrows arched like Rama's bow and beneath them a nose straight as Rama's spear. Love dwelt upon his lips and the Sun-god himself shone as a jewel in the necklace round his throat.

The Lord Krishna began to play upon his flute while round him the milkmaids danced and sang. Then the milkmaids came in a body to the Lord Krishna and begged him to dance with them. Instantly Narsi Mehta saw scores of Krishnas all round him, until each milkmaid had one of them as her partner in the dance. And as each maiden

danced she kissed the fingers and put dainties into the mouth of the laughing god.

Suddenly the dance stopped and the many Krishnas became one again. Then the Lord Krishna went up to the god Shiva and asked him who the maiden was, whom he had brought with him. The god Shiva told him all Narsi Mehta's story. The Lord Krishna listened and at the end embraced Narsi Mehta and then bade the god Shiva take him back again. Instantly Narsi Mehta found himself back at the temple and a moment later the god Shiva had vanished.

But Narsi Mehta could not forget the song of the dancing maidens and all day long he sang and danced as they had done round and near Shiva's temple. At last some cow-herds heard his voice and going to the temple saw Narsi Mehta and told his cousin. He went and found Narsi Mehta half distraught by the vision he had seen. With some difficulty he induced the boy to forget the harsh words of his wife and to go back home.

From the moment that Narsi Mehta had been vouchsafed a vision of the Lord Krishna, his nature changed completely; and from being an idle boy who thought of nothing but play, he became grave and devout and ardent in the pursuit of knowledge. The learned men of Junagad said that just as a village brook becomes part of Ganga when it meets the great river, so Narsi Mehta had after meeting the Lord Krishna become one with him. At last his reputation for saintliness became so great that a pious Brahman gave Narsi Mehta his daughter in marriage, although his relatives blamed him for doing so, just as men blamed Himalaya king of mountains for giving his daughter Parvati to Shiva.

Narsi Mehta's wife bore him a son and as time passed it became necessary to find the son a wife. Now it is the custom in Junagad for priests to arrange marriages and one Krishnam-bhat settled a marriage between Narsi Mehta's son and the

daughter of a rich banker named Tripurantak. The banker at first would not hear of it but Krishnambhat threatened, if Tripurantak did not yield, that he would cut his finger off and sprinkle the blood over the banker's house. At last Tripurantak said, "I agree, provided that Narsi Mehta brings with him to the wedding 500 elephants and a train of horses and palanquins and carriages and gives a banquet and feeds all the people of Junagad." Krishnambhat accepted the condition and went to Narsi Mehta and told him that he had arranged his son's wedding but did not tell him of the hard terms made by Tripurantak. Next morning Narsi Mehta set forth alone for the banker's house. But as he went he noticed first one elephant and then another and then another walking in front of him. Then horsemen and carriages and yet more elephants joined them at every cross-road, until at last a vast multitude preceded Narsi Mehta and the air resounded with kettle drums and all manner of wind instruments. When he reached Tripurantak's house, he saw the Lord Krishna himself preparing so splendid a feast that the preparations of the rich banker seemed as wretched as a locust seems when it flies side by side with an eagle. Tripurantak could no longer refuse his consent and reluctantly he allowed the marriage. In the same way Narsi Mehta's daughter married into a rich family. When she had reached the age of puberty, her father-in-law invited Narsi Mehta and his wife to be present at the consummation ceremony. His wife did not wish to go, because she knew that they could not buy the expected gifts. But Narsi Mehta said, "Although I have no money with which to buy gifts, the Lord Krishna will be my helper." In the garb of an anchorite, with cymbals in his hands and a rosary round his neck, he appeared at Tripurantak's house. When the guests saw him come, they began to laugh and sneer at him, for he had not brought a single present with him. Narsi Mehta's daughter was much distressed and told her father.

He went to each of the guests and bade him write down on a piece of paper whatever gifts he desired. All but one wrote down what he thought a proper present. But one wrote down, "A stone." "For," said he, turning to the other guests, "that is the only gift he will be able to pay for."

When the guests had finished writing, Narsi Mehta took the paper in his hand and prayed for help to the Lord Krishna. The prayer had hardly left his lips, when a Brahman outside the door asked admittance. "Who are you?" asked the guests. "I am Narsi Mehta's servant," answered the Brahman, "and I have brought presents from him to celebrate the auspicious day." He then opened the bundle and distributed to each guest the very present which he had written on the slip of paper. At last he went up to him who had asked for a stone and taking from the bundle a large boulder placed it, amidst the laughter of the other guests, upon the doubter's head. When they had finished laughing, they looked round but could see no trace of the Brahman servant. It was the Lord Krishna and he had vanished.

35. RAMDAS OF DAKOR

Once upon a time there lived at Dakor a pious Brahman who used every fortnight to go on a pilgrimage to Dwarka. He would take a staff of teakwood in the handle of which he had planted a tulsi. When he saw Dwarka in the distance he would feel as glad as a peasant who sees rain fall in time of a famine or as a young wife when she sees her mother's house. He would bathe in the Gomti river, worship the Manas lake and lastly offer his tulsi flowers to the Lord Krishna. For 25 years he went thus every fortnight to Dwarka. At last he grew weary and faint with years and throwing himself at the Lord Krishna's feet, he cried, "This is my last visit. I have not the strength to come again to visit you." The image

smiled at him and stretching out its four arms it embraced him. "Take me then with you," said the Lord Krishna. "But how can I?" asked Ramdas. "Yoke horses to-night to my chariot and I shall sit in it. Then you can drive me to Dakor." That night Ramdas yoked horses to the god's chariot. The instant that he had done so, he was aware that the massive idol of the Lord Krishna was seated in it. Whipping his horses, Ramdas drove with all speed to his native town.

Early next morning the priests went as usual to wave lights round the god to wake him. But the image was missing from the temple. They looked about and saw that the chariot was also gone and that its wheel marks ran along the road to Dakor. Then they cried, "Ramdas must have stolen the idol". With all speed the priests and the pilgrims followed Ramdas' track. When he saw them coming he threw the image into a pond, and when the priests questioned him, he told them falsely that he knew nothing of it. They searched his house, then all the houses in the village, then all the wells and last of all the pond into which Ramdas had thrown the idol. While they were probing the bottom with their spears, the point of one entered its body and blood rose to the surface. "Here he is," they cried joyfully, "we have found Ranchod." Then diving into the water, they took the idol out and seated it again in its chariot.

The pilgrims, happy at recovering the image, left it unguarded to eat their meal. Ramdas went up to it sadly and said, "O Help of the helpless, protector of the oppressed, to keep you I spoke falsely, yet you have deserted me." But the image only smiled at him and said, "Fear nothing. Just as I have for many hundred years stood upon Pundalik's brick, so I shall stay at Dakor always." "But," said Ramdas, "the priests will take you away in the chariot; how can I stop them?" "Go to them," answered the Lord Krishna, "and offer for my image its weight in gold. They will agree. Then take

your wife's gold nose-ring and put it in the scales. I shall make myself so light that I shall be lighter than the nose-ring."

Ramdas did as the Lord Krishna bade him. He told the priests that he had stolen the image but that he would pay them its weight in gold, if they let him keep it. The priests agreed to the bargain. Then Ramdas went to the villagers and bade them be his witnesses and see that the priests kept their promise. But the villagers laughed at him and said, " You wretched beggar ! What do you mean ? You have not enough to eat, much less can you buy images for their weight in gold." " Nay," answered Ramdas, " you are wrong to call me a beggar. A fool to whom Saraswati imparts her wisdom is no longer a fool. I to whose home the Lord Krishna came am poor no more." The villagers laughed at him but in the end went to see him buy the image. " If you keep your part of the bargain," they joked, " we will see that the priests keep theirs." They brought a huge pair of scales and in one scale the priests put the Lord Krishna's image. " Now bring the gold," said the priests, and the villagers echoed in derision, " Yes ; go and fetch your gold." Ramdas went to his house and fetched his wife's nose-ring. He put it into the opposite scale. When the villagers saw what he was doing, they laughed until the tears rolled down their cheeks. " Look at his treasure !" they cried. " He has brought the price of the image ten times over." But while they laughed, the scale which contained the idol slowly rose from the ground, while that which held the nose-ring sank downwards. For a moment the villagers were silent. Then with changed voices and laughing no more they said, " A miracle ! A miracle ! For Ramdas the Lord Krishna has worked a miracle." They bade the priests go back empty-handed from Dakor. The priests went back to Dwarka and built there a new idol. But Ramdas' image stands at Dakor to this day.

36. SHANTA BAHMANI

Once there ruled at Bedar a Musulman king called Shanta Bahmani. He had a fair young wife to whom he gave flowers and perfumes and rich clothes and costly jewels. That no eye but his should behold her, he placed guards all round his palace and used to pass his days in toying with his beloved, free from all fear of intrusion.

One morning the king and his fair queen were sitting on the balcony of their palace and were eating sugared plantains. As they ate them, they threw the skins into the courtyard below. Suddenly the queen noticed in the courtyard a wretched, half-witted beggar who was picking up and sucking the plantain skins. She pointed him out to her husband. Shanta Bahmani became very angry and called to his guards. "I posted you round my palace," he said, "to prevent strangers coming in, yet you let in this mad beggar." The guards rushed at the beggarman and showered on him kicks and blows. But the beggarman only burst into a fit of laughter. The king was amazed at his laughter and asked him from the balcony why he laughed. "I laughed," said the beggarman, "when I thought of the awful fate which lay in store for you, O king. If I was half killed for merely sucking a plantain skin, what will be your fate who ate the plantain fruit? If I got this tempest of kicks for merely sitting below the wall of your palace, what will you get who spend all your life inside it?"

The words of the beggar so affected the king, that he burst into tears and, flinging aside his royal robes, left his palace and fled into the woods. When he reached the heart of the forest, he sat down to perform penances and mortify himself, so as to escape the punishment of which the beggarman had spoken. But he did not know how to perform them properly and he often sighed to himself and said, "If only I knew how to worship God and sing hymns in praise of him!"

If some one would only teach me how to do penances properly, that I might win the favour of the Lord Krishna ! ”

One day in the month of Ashad some pilgrims bound for Pandharpur passed through the forest wherein Shanta Bahmani lived. They were singing and dancing as they went. The sandal-paste marks on their foreheads shone in the sun, while the banners in their hands fluttered in the breeze. Shanta Bahmani ran up to them and prostrating himself before them asked for and obtained leave to go with them to Pandharpur. On reaching the holy place he worshipped Pundalik’s image, bathed in the Chandrabhaga¹ and then entering the temple of the Lord Krishna prostrated himself before the image. Lastly he prayed to the Lord Krishna : “Great Lord of the Discus,” he prayed, “ I have come to take shelter at your feet, but I have no Guru to teach me your doctrines or how to worship you. Vouchsafe to me some teacher, that I may learn how to adore you.” For three days and nights Shanta Bahmani stayed near the Lord Krishna’s image without tasting food or water. At last the Lord Krishna took pity on him and, appearing to him in a dream, bade him go to the great saint Sahajanand Swami of Kalyan. Directly Shanta Bahmani awoke he set out for Kalyan. When he reached it Sahajanand Swami was no longer there. At first Shanta Bahmani despaired, then he remembered that it was the month of Kartik and thought that perhaps Sahajanand Swami had gone to Pandharpur. He retraced his steps and finding the great saint in the Lord Krishna’s temple, told him about the vision that the Lord Krishna had vouchsafed to him. Sahajanand listened kindly to the penitent king and took him to his hermitage. There he gave him the name of Mrityanjaya and taught him how to love and how to worship the Lord Krishna and all the secrets of his divine nature. In this way Mrityanjaya came to possess the true knowledge.

1. The Bhima in front of Pandharpur is called the Chandrabhaga.

In course of time Mrityanjaya came to be known as a great saint also and a holy lingayat called Bhavaraya came to the hermitage and learnt wisdom from his lips. It so happened that another lingayat called Samucchaya, who was falsely reputed to be a pious man, heard of this and began to speak ill of Bhavaraya. "How can a Yavan¹," Samucchaya would say, "teach anybody anything? To become a Yavan's pupil is like a man putting his shoes on his head or a woman wearing her toe-ring in her nose." When Bhavaraya heard of what Samucchaya said, he told Mrityanjaya. But the latter reassured him and bade him pay no heed to the words of the wicked.

Some time after this a certain king called Kashipati, who was very zealous in the worship of Shiva gave a feast to ten thousand lingayats. With his own hand he served ghee and sugar and then bade his guests make an offering to Shiva. When they had done so, all suddenly became aware that their lingas were missing. Then they fell into the depths of despair. "The god Shiva will be angry with us," they moaned. "He will certainly destroy us. When our Guru gave us our lingas he warned us never to part with them. Our natures must have been impure and so the god Shiva punished us." When king Kashipati learnt what had befallen them, he said sternly, "Someone among you must have persecuted some saint before coming here. That was why the god Shiva shunned you. Who among you was it?"

At last Samucchaya confessed that he had persecuted Bhavaraya, because he had become the pupil of a Yavan. King Kashipati said, "Go all of you to Mrityanjaya and implore his pardon. It may be that he will save you from the god Shiva's anger." The lingayats rose and going to Mrityanjaya's hermitage, they told him what had happened and begged him to forgive Samucchaya and to help them.

¹. A Musulman.

Mrityanjaya spoke kindly to them saying, "I have two dogs in my house called Vedanta and Siddhanta.¹ They must have run away with your lingas." Then he called out "Vedanta!" Instantly a dog appeared. Mrityanjaya said, "Give the lingayats back their lingas at once." As he spoke 5,000 lingas poured out of the dog's mouth. Then he called out "Siddhanta." Instantly another dog appeared. "Give back those lingas you stole," said Mrityanjaya. As he spoke the remaining 5,000 lingas poured out of Siddhanta's mouth. The lingayats prostrated themselves humbly before Mrityanjaya and then tried to pick out each his own linga. But they could not do it. So they again fell at Mrityanjaya's feet. "As you cannot pick out your lingas," said Mrityanjaya smiling, "each linga will pick out its owner." The two heaps of lingas began to move and each linga separating itself from the others went sliding along the floor, until it stopped opposite its owner. The lingayats were struck dumb with wonder. Then they broke into shouts of praise. They lauded Mrityanjaya to the skies. Then they returned to king Kashipati's palace and sat down again to his banquet.

37. THE STORY OF DAMAJIPANT

Once upon a time a certain pious Brahman named Damajipant was in the service of the king of Bedar. Although the latter was a Musulman, Damajipant served him well and won his confidence; and the king to reward him made him governor of Mangalvedha fourteen miles from Pandharpur.

Unhappily a great famine came. The grass withered, the pools dried up and every living thing died. The strong left the country. The weak stayed behind and many of them perished. One day a hungry Brahman from Pandharpur went

1. They may be translated as Dogma and Doctrine.

to Damajipant's house to beg. Damajipant bowed to him and bade him enter the house and eat. The Brahman accepted joyfully and Damajipant seated him courteously on a dining platform. After the Brahman had cleansed his mouth and was about to partake of the food placed before him, he suddenly burst into tears. Damajipant asked him what ailed him. "While I am feasting in your house," replied the Brahman, "my wife and children are starving. They have eaten nothing for four days." "Set your mind at rest," said Damajipant; "they shall not starve. I shall feed you all through the famine. This very evening I shall send two cart-loads of grain to your wife and children." With these words Damajipant rose and bade his servant fill two carts with sacks of grain and send them to Pandharpur. When the servants had left Mangalvedha, they passed through a large village. The villagers saw the grain and half-mad with hunger rushed at the carts, tore open the sacks and carried off the grain. The Brahman began to lament loudly at his loss. Hearing him, other Brahmans of Pandharpur gathered round him and asked him who had given him the grain. "Damajipant of Mangalvedha," replied the poor Brahman. On hearing his answer the Brahmans went as fast as they could to Damajipant's house, and begged for food. "We are Brahmans of Pandharpur," they said: "we are starving; give us food and we shall bless you all our lives."

A great pity for them filled Damajipant's heart. He went into his house and said to his wife, "The courtyard is filled with starving Brahmans. I cannot possibly feed all of them from my own store of grain. Yet if I send them away, they will die. If I distribute among them the grain in the king's store-house I shall save them. But the king will be angry with me and will kill me. What shall I do?" "You must do anything you can," answered his wife, "that will save the Brahmans." Damajipant thought a moment and then

said, "Yes ; you are right. The king will kill me. But what matters my life if I save the lives of all these Brahmans ?" He went to the king's store-house and took from it a quantity of grain and gave it to the Brahmans. When they returned home the news of Damajipant's charity spread all over Pandharpur. The whole population, Brahmans, Kshattriyas, Vaishyas and Sudras rushed off to Mangalvedha. Damajipant distributed among them all the grain that remained in the royal granary.

Unfortunately the Muzumdar—a Kanada Brahman—who had long been jealous of Damajipant, heard what he had done and at once reported his conduct to the king at Bedar. The king read the letter and became so angry that he lost all self-control. He sent messengers at once to order Damajipant to present himself at Bedar and render an account of his office. "If I find a single error in it," roared the king, "I shall instantly cut his head off." The messengers arrived at Mangalvedha and shewed Damajipant the royal order. The villagers to whom he had given the grain looked idly on and said one to the other, "They will take him to Bedar and there the king will cut his head off." When Damajipant read the letter, his heart for a moment sank within him. Then he regained his courage. He said, "I knew when I gave the grain that I might lose my life. But I risked it to save the lives of others." Then he said to the messengers, "I have a boon to ask of you. Take me to Bedar by the road that goes past Pandharpur." Although the road was a little longer, the messengers consented. When they reached Pandharpur, Damajipant bathed in the Bhima and entering the gate of the temple of the Lord Krishna prostrated himself before his image. "Helper of the helpless," he prayed, "Saviour of the world, Lord of the Earth, I have come to bid you farewell. I have committed a crime. I was unfaithful to the trust that the king placed in me. He has called me

to Bedar where he will have me beheaded. But whatever happens to me, Lord Krishna, do not cease to bestow on me your favour." Then he placed his head close to the image and kissed its feet. The messengers shook him and said, "Come ; it is late, we must go at once." Damajipant rose and bowing to the Lord Krishna, to Satyabhama and Rukmani, to Garuda and Hanuman, went away with the messengers.

When the Lord Krishna heard Damajipant's prayer, he said to himself, "This is a just man and I must save him. What is a fault in the eyes of the king is in my eyes a righteous act." He quickly estimated the value of the grain in the royal granary and put in a sack its equivalent in gold. Then he disguised himself as a Mhar and writing a petition to the king in Damajipant's handwriting went with it and the sack of gold to Bedar. When he reached the king's gate at Bedar he said to the door-keeper, "I have come from Mangalvedha on an urgent matter. I have business with the king." The door-keeper told the king's Vazir and the Vazir called the Mhar to him. "Who are you ?" asked the Vazir. "My name," answered the Lord Krishna, "is Vithu Naik. I and my family have served Damajipant and his family for generations. I have brought a letter from him." With these words he put the letter in front of the Vazir. The Vazir recognized Damajipant's handwriting and took it and the Mhar to the king. He told the king who the Mhar was and with the king's leave read the letter aloud. The letter ran, "O Lord of Lords ! O king of the Earth, this is the humble prayer of your servant Damaji. A famine came upon the country. The price of grain rose very high. I sold 7,000 khandis of your grain at four annas higher in the rupee than the usual rate. I have sent a sack of money with my servant Vithu Naik. He will pay you the full amount. Please acknowledge its receipt." The courtiers laughed at the letter. For the sack was quite a small one and according to the account it should contain

Rs. 1,78,000. They advised the king to have the money counted. He bade his clerks do so, but as fast as the clerks emptied the sack and counted its contents it filled again with money. At last they were quite wearied out with counting, and the money which they had counted exceeded the sum due. So the king ordered the sack and the money to be thrown into the treasury. "The Muzumdar is a liar," cried the king angrily. "I order all his goods to be seized and him and his family to be imprisoned." At the same time he bade his treasurer bestow handsome robes of honour and a jewelled ring upon Damajipant. The Mhar then said, "Give me a receipt, O king, otherwise I shall be late in reaching Mangalvedha." The king ordered the Vazir to give him a receipt and a dress as a present. In return the Mhar said, "May your life be long, O king, may your wealth be great!" and after prostrating himself departed.

In the meantime Damajipant and the messengers had missed their way and did not reach Bedar until late next evening. They brought Damaji trembling into the royal presence. But the king sprang from his throne and embraced him. "It is all a mistake, Damajipant," he cried; "yesterday your servant Vithu Naik brought your letter and the price of the grain. I am very pleased with you and I have bidden the Vazir give you a rich reward."

Damajipant at first could not believe his ears. Then he thought to himself, "I have no servant called Vithu Naik. That Mhar must have been none other than the Lord Krishna." Then he told the whole story to the king, who pardoned him. "It is I, Damajipant," said the king, "who am your debtor, for through you I have seen with my own eyes the Lord Krishna." At his own request he gave Damajipant leave to resign the royal service. And the rest of their lives Damajipant and his wife spent in worshipping the Lord Krishna at Pandharpur and in singing his praises.

38. KURMADAS

Once upon a time the Sun's charioteer Aruna¹ was born in a Brahman family at Paithan. Just as Aruna came but half-formed from the egg of queen Vinata, so his avatar Kurmadas was born without hands or feet. He used to drag himself through the village to hear kirtans and he used often to sigh and say, "If I could only go to Pandharpur, the Lord Krishna would extend to me his favour."

One day he spoke in this strain to some pilgrims. But they laughed at him and said, "When a bird has no wings, it cannot cross the mountain ranges. If a man is bankrupt, he cannot feed beggars. You have no hands or feet; how then can you talk of going to Pandharpur?" Poor Kurmadas grew very sad and said, "Unless I see Pandharpur I shall have to endure the pain and the sorrow of innumerable lives!" That evening he resolved to start for Pandharpur. But after he had crawled only two miles he had to stop exhausted. He took shelter in a small temple to Maruti and prayed in despair to the Lord Krishna: "I have no hope of reaching Pandharpur unless you help me, Help of the helpless." The Lord Krishna was touched at his devotion and taking the guise of a money-lender, walked to where Kurmadas sat. "Who are you?" said the money-lender. "Where are you going and why have you no hands or feet?" Kurmadas gave his name and said that he had been born a cripple and that he wished to go to Pandharpur. He then asked the newcomer where he was going and what his name was. "My name is Vithoba Khisti," said the stranger. "I have a shop at Pandharpur. If you like we can go there together. I like a companion on the road."

"But I cannot be your companion," said Kurmadas; "you will walk, I can only crawl." "Never mind," said Vithoba; "I have to collect debts as I go. So I shall not travel more than two miles a day. Whenever you are tired, stop. I shall

i. See *Tales from the Indian Epics.*

find you and bring you food. I love helping pilgrims on the road to Pandharpur." That evening Vithoba and Kurmadas dined together and slept in Maruti's temple. Next morning Vithoba went ahead; but in the evening he joined Kurmadas at a village some two miles on. In this way they journeyed for four months. But when the 10th of the bright half of Kartik came they had only reached Lahul. There a body of pilgrims on the way to Pandharpur overtook them. "They will be in time for to-morrow's festival," thought Kurmadas sadly, "but I shall not be. The Lord Krishna has failed me. I shall have to wait until the month of Ashad. Had I but feet I could get to Pandharpur in time." Then he cried to the pilgrims, "I am a cripple as you see. I tried to reach Pandharpur in time for the 11th of the bright half of Kartik. But it is still 14 miles away. I cannot hope to reach it now. Give, therefore, a message from me to the Lord Krishna. Tell him that as the chatak bird longs for the cloud or the partridge for the moon, so Kurmadas longs to see the Lord Krishna." "We will take your message gladly," answered the pilgrims, and they went on to the holy city singing hymns to the Lord Krishna. When they reached it they entered the temple and danced before his image. Then one of them remembered the cripple's message. "O king of kings," he said, "a cripple Kurmadas by name has sent you a message by us. He prays that you should visit him at Lahul. He has neither hands nor feet. So he cannot be here to-morrow at your festival."

When the Lord Krishna heard the message he called to him Dnyandev and Namdev and bade them set out with him to find Kurmadas. As they drew near Kurmadas, he felt that some great happiness was coming to him. His right eyelid twitched. His right arm throbbed. Suddenly, four-armed and flashing with jewels in diadem and necklace, the Lord Krishna shewed himself to Kurmadas and bade him ask for a boon. "All I want," said Kurmadas, "is that you

should stay here always." And the Lord Krishna vouchsafed Kurmadas' prayer. For the pilgrims built a temple at Lahul on the spot where the Lord Krishna had revealed himself; and to-day Lahul is hardly less holy than Pandharpur.

39. RAKA THE POTTER

Once upon a time a Gujarathi potter named Raka lived at Pandharpur. As he went through the town selling his pots, you could hear him coming a long way off. For as he walked he sang always songs in praise of the Lord Krishna.

One day he fashioned some pots and put them inside his house. His cat gave birth to a litter of kittens in one of the pots. One day when the cat had gone out to catch food for its kittens, Raka, who had forgotten that inside one of the pots were the kittens, took the pots to his kiln and heaping firewood in the kiln began to harden them in the fire. In the meantime the cat came back and missed its kittens. It first looked inside the house and then outside the house. Then it walked to Raka's kiln mewing piteously. Raka suddenly remembered the kittens. But it was too late to do anything, for the firewood was burning furiously. Raka struck his forehead with his hand and called to his wife Banka. She ran to the kiln and he told her what had happened. "We must pray to the Lord Krishna," she said. "He saved the Pandavas from the house of lac. He saved Pralhad from the fire. If we pray to him he may save the kittens."

All that day and for two nights and days afterwards Raka and Banka prayed to the Lord Krishna. On the third day the fire in the kiln burnt out and Raka and his wife went to it to see what had happened to the kittens. They found that all the pots except one had been baked in the fire. But the clay of one pot was as fresh as when Raka had put it into the kiln and inside it were the kittens perfectly well and

happy. The cat ran up to them and taking them one by one in its mouth brought them back to Raka's house.

40. THE END OF DNYANDEV AND HIS BRETHREN

One morning when Namdev was sitting in the Lord Krishna's temple at Pandharpur, Dnyandev, followed by Nivratti, Sopana and Muktabai, entered it. Dnyandev had by this time grown weary of the world and his spirit wished to go to Vaikunth whence it had come down on earth. He threw himself at the feet of the Lord Krishna's image and told him that he wished to be buried at Pandharpur. The Lord Krishna replied, "No : your grave must be at Alandi. Here men would neglect you for me. But if your grave is at Alandi, it will become a place hardly less holy than Pandharpur. Pilgrims who come here on the 11th of the bright half of Ashad and Kartik will go on to Alandi and visit your grave on the 11th of the dark half."

Dnyandev thought for a while over the Lord Krishna's answer and said, "Tell me, Lord Krishna, why you have chosen for me Alandi and why you call it a holy place." "Once upon a time," answered the Lord Krishna, "the Lord Shiva and Parvati were walking near Alandi. The god Indra, to scoff at Parvati, asked her how she could endure a husband who wore always the garb of an anchorite. Parvati, angered at the question, cursed Indra and foretold that he would bear a woman's name and be turned to water. Indra in despair prayed to the Lord Shiva and practised austerities to win his favour. At last the Lord Shiva was pleased with the lesser god and bade him ask for a boon. Indra prayed that he might be freed from the curse laid on him by Parvati. The Lord Shiva spoke to Parvati and she partly relented. Indra did not turn wholly to water. The river Indrayani, it is true, sprang from his body. But the Lord

Shiva made the river sacred to himself. And from that time on, Alandi on its banks has been dear to Shiva."

When Dnyandev heard this tale he consented to be buried at Alandi. He went there, accompanied by his brother, his sister and Namdev. On the 8th of the dark half of the month of Kartik he started for Alandi and reached it on the roth. On the 11th he fasted. On the 12th he broke his fast, feasting in the prescribed manner. On the 13th the Lord Krishna appeared to him and told him that the time had come for him to go back to Vaikunth. Taking Dnyandev by the hand, he showed him a grave that he himself had dug beneath the image of Nandi in Shiva's temple. Within was a deer's skin spread for the saint to sit upon. His brother Nivratti lit a wood fire inside. Dnyandev inhaled the fumes and became slowly stupefied. As he lay insensible, Nivratti closed the opening with a stone and the spirit of the great saint passed back from earth to heaven. But his staff grew up through the earth into a golden pipal tree. And by the grave the Lord Krishna planted an Ajan or unknown tree. And both trees may be seen there and are worshipped to this day.

When Margashirsha month came, Sopana asked the Lord Krishna to tell him at what spot he should be buried. The Lord Krishna bade him go to Sasvad, a lovely spot on the banks of the Bhogavati. Namdev, Nivratti, Sopana and Muktabai started together for Sasvad. There, too, the Lord Krishna shewed Nivratti a grave which he had dug and in which he had spread a deer's skin. He took Sopana by the hand and seated him on the deer's skin. Nivratti lit a wood fire and, when Sopana had lost consciousness, closed the entrance of the grave. On the roth of the dark half of Vaishakh, Muktabai vanished on the banks of the Tapti river in a flash of lightning. Last of all Nivratti, after asking the Lord Krishna to choose him a grave, buried himself alive on the 12th of the dark half of Jeshta at Trimbakeshwar.